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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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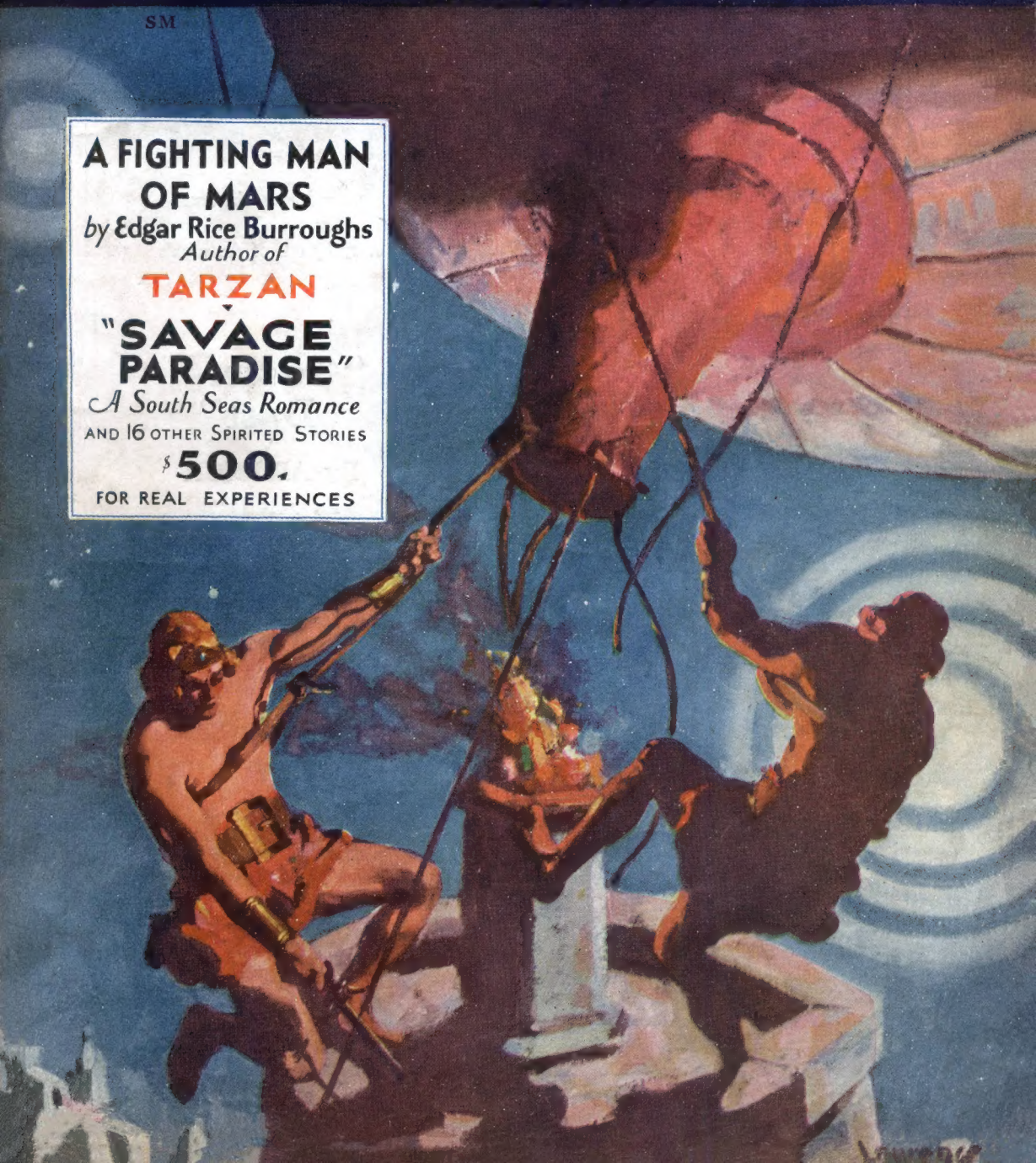

A FIGHTING MAN OF MARS

by Edgar Rice Burroughs
Author of
TARZAN

"SAVAGE PARADISE"

A South Seas Romance

AND 16 OTHER SPIRITED STORIES

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THE star pitcher had used a six-gun down in Texas—and when the crucial game started, he was fighting to rescue his girl from a racketeer gang armed with machine-guns . . . . . A thrill-crammed story by one of America's ablest sports-writers.

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Edgar Rice Burroughs' great "A Fighting Man of Mars," a stirring Western novel by **Rollin Brown,** the climax of "Savage Paradise" and many others, all in the next, the July, issue of—

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

The McCall Company, Publisher, 230 Park Avenue, New York

LOOK AT "AMBITIOUS ALEC" WASTING HIS TIME OVER THAT FOOL BOOK AGAIN
HE WANTS TO BE A SALESMAN-BUT THEY HAVE TO BE "BORN" NOT MADE
FORGET IT! YOU'LL NEVER BE ANYTHING BUT A CLERK LIKE ALL THE REST OF US

They Scoffed At Me For Reading This Book

..But It Showed Me the Way to Raise My Pay to $10,000 a Year!

IT WAS only a little book—just seven ounces of paper and printer's ink—but it altered the course of my whole career in a way that is truly amazing!

It all came about through a lucky accident. I was no more than a cog in a big machine. Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The time-clock constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to waning hopes and unfulfilled ambition. Four times a day it hurled a silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was.

But worst of all was the never-ending worry over money. I had to stretch every penny to make both ends meet—constantly scrimping, scraping and economizing—going without the good things of life . . . One day I happened to get a look at the firm's payroll and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. I found that salesman Turner made $175 a week—and Elliot pulled down $260!

The Turning Point

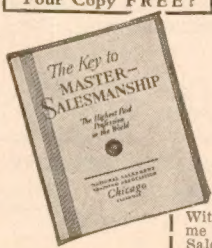
And that night came the "lucky accident"! Leafing through a magazine, I stumbled across an article on salesmanship. And what an eye-opener it was! For the first time, I discovered that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. As proof, I read about a former $8 a week restaurant worker, M. Barichievich, of California, making $125 a week after learning the ins-and-outs of Salesmanship.

What I Discovered

My first step was to write for a certain little book—"The Key to Master Salesmanship" — mentioned in the article. Before I had read three pages, I knew I was on the right track at last. For the book, small as it was, was packed with hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the real truth about the science of selling. I even learned exactly how to go about getting into this highest paid of all professions without losing a day or a dollar from my present job!

Furthermore, I found that The National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective free employment service. Last year they received requests for over 50,000 men trained by their method. Hundreds have found excellent positions this way.

Where Shall We Send Your Copy FREE?



Up The Ladder

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A. A good many of the fellows at the office scoffed at me and said I was wasting my time. But that didn't stop me—for I *knew* what I was doing!

Within a few weeks I had mastered the N. S. T. A. method — spending only about an hour a day of my spare time. When I was ready, they found me eight openings to choose from—and I selected one that paid me $325 a month to start.

Since then, big things have happened. Today my salary is $100 a week greater than ever before. No more ringing time-clocks or pinching pennies now!

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See for yourself WHY "The Key to Master Salesmanship," has been the deciding factor in the careers of so many men who are now making $10,000 a year. You do not risk one penny nor incur the slightest obligation. And since it may mean the turning point of your whole career, it certainly is worth your time to fill out and clip the blank below. Send it now!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
Dept. G-32, N.S.T.A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. G-32, N.S.T.A. Bldg., Chicago, Illinois.

Without cost or obligation you may send me your free book, "The Key to Master Salesmanship," and tell me about your Free Employment Service and other features of the N.S.T.A.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State.....

Age ..... Occupation.....

THE BLUE BOOK

JUNE, 1930

Cover Design: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "A Fighting Man of Mars."
Frontispiece: "Songs of Sea and Trail: X—'The Railroad Corral.'" Drawn by Allen Moir Dean.

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THE McCALL COMPANY, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine

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MAGAZINE

Vol. 51, No. 2

Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization.

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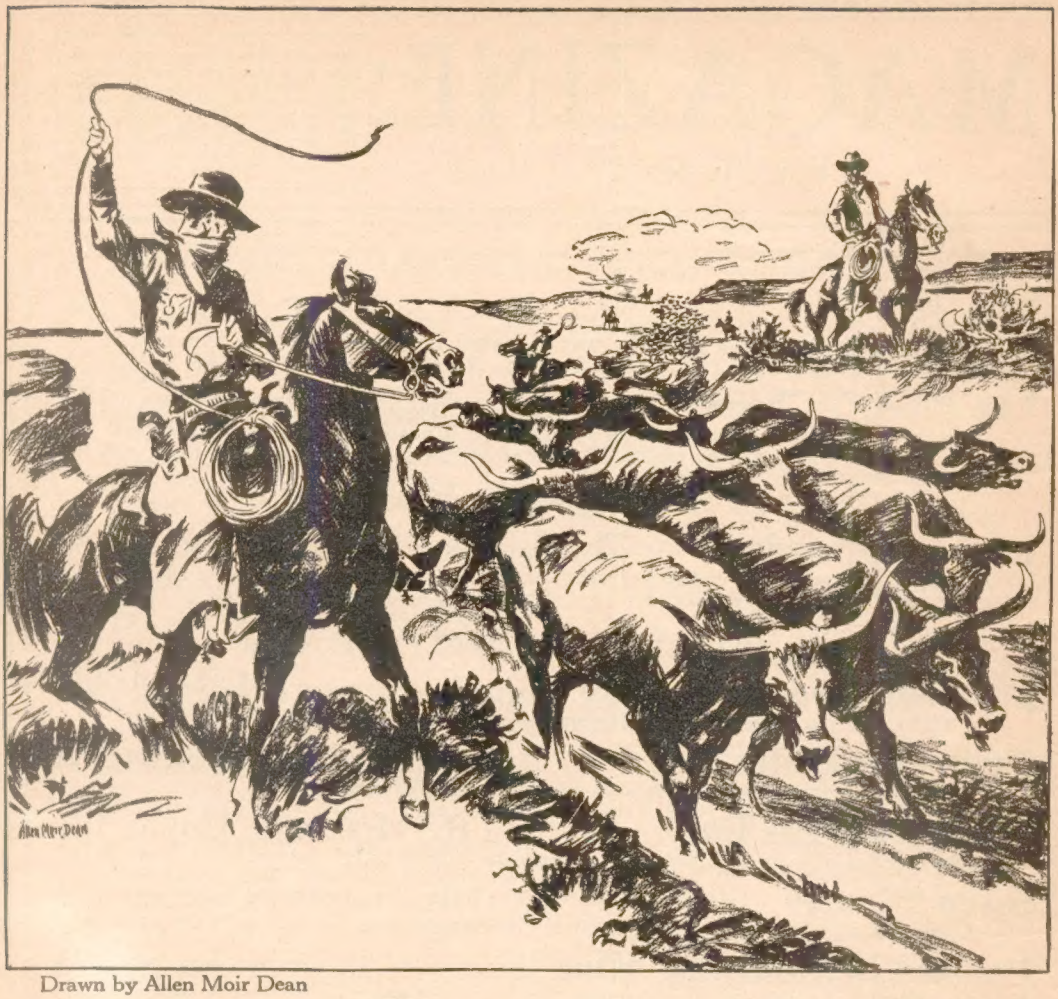
Photo by Brinkmann

Rollin Brown

He is a true son of the West, and made his first reputation as a writing-man in the pages of this magazine with stories like "The Touch of God" and "Forgotten Country," which only one who has himself lived through similar scenes could achieve. His fine story "Mountain Mystery" in a recent issue will be followed next month by a captivating short novel called—

"The Voice of Silent Men"



Drawn by Allen Moir Dean

SONGS OF SEA AND TRAIL

X—The Railroad Corral

Oh, we're up in the morning ere breaking of day;
The chuck wagon's busy, the flapjacks in play;
The herd is astir o'er hillside and vale,
With the night riders rounding them into the trail.
Oh, come take up your cinches, come shake out your reins;
Come wake your old bronco and break for the plains;
Come roust out your steers from the long chaparral,
For the outfit is off to the railroad corral.

The sun circles upward; the steers as they plod
Are pounding to powder the hot prairie sod;
And it seems, as the dust makes you dizzy and sick,
That we'll never reach noon and the cool, shady creek.
But tie up your kerchief and ply up your nag;
Come dry up your grumbles and try not to lag;
Come with your steers from the long chaparral,
For we're far on the road to the railroad corral.

The afternoon shadows are starting to lean,
When the chuck wagon sticks in the marshy ravine;
The herd scatters farther than vision can look,
For you bet all true punchers will help out the cook.
Come shake out your rawhide and snake it up fair;
Come break your old bronco to take in his share;
Come from your steers in the long chaparral,
For 'tis all in the drive to the railroad corral.

But the longest of days must reach evening at last,
The hills are all climbed, the creeks are all past;
The tired herd droops in the yellowing light;
Let them loaf if they will, for the railroad's in sight.
So flap up your holster and snap up your belt;
Strap up your saddle whose lap you have felt;
Good-by to the steers from the long chaparral,
For there's a town that's a trunk by the railroad corral.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 51 JUNE, 1930 No. 2

Know Your World

"KNOW thyself," said the ancient philosopher. Sage advice, surely—but only the half of it. For of hardly less importance is another admonition: know your world.

Know your world—the vast colorful amazing place you live in, the wholly similar but infinitely varied men and women who people it. For in large measure your happiness and your success depend on that knowledge—on finding your place in it and fitting yourself to that place.

A difficult requirement—in any complete sense, of course, an impossible one. For even in this so-mobile age the most resolute and best equipped of travelers can visit only a small portion of this fine large earth in one small lifetime; nor can the most sociable of men know more than a sparse group of his fellows. And most of us, preoccupied with the immediate demands of living and tied down by a multitude of obligations, would be defeated at the outset in an attempt to know our world—but for one thing: the aid afforded by the reading of fiction.

You will realize this better, perhaps, if you will "think back," when you have read this magazine, over the wealth of new pictures, new facts, new knowledge it has afforded you, over the interesting men and women you have been enabled to know in the revealing crises of their lives.

When you have read, for example, Adam Sadler's exciting romance of the South Seas, "Savage Paradise," with its glamorous background of tropic waters and strange island life, its queer outcast white adventurers, its colonial officials and its untamed natives—

When you have read Captain Dupuy's lively novel of the American army expedition to Siberia with its story of international plot and counterplot in Vladivostok, its patrols and battles in the snow, its picture of life in a frigid wilderness—

When you have read Warren Hastings Miller's story of battle with implacable Nature and hostile tribesmen in his story of an American rubber plantation in the Orient, "The Dark Forest;" when you have read Clarence Herbert New's significant story of a great invention in "Free Lances in Diplomacy;" when you have read Robert Winchester's lively tale of the air patrol on the Southwestern border—when you have read these and the many other stories of varied people and places and events, not forgetting your fellow-readers' narratives of their most interesting experiences, has not your knowledge of this world been enormously increased?

And Edgar Rice Burroughs' daring "A Fighting Man of Mars," dealing not with this world at all but with life as he imagines it on an inhabited neighbor planet—is it not, by reason of its significant contrasts, most illuminating of all?

—*The Editor.*

SAVAGE PARADISE

Islands of romance, seas of adventure; mystery in the background and danger always to the fore: here you will find a splendid story of the South Seas by a writer new to these pages.

By ADAM SADLER

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

THE sun flamed above the horizon, and the sea-mists were pierced by great bars in all colors of the rainbow when I opened my aching eyes upon a rocking world. My feet were bare; my collar was fastened carefully about my right ankle, and my tie, neatly bowed, made a garter above my left knee. My shoes were slung round my neck with what was apparently the remnant of my hat—its brim. My head throbbed; my tongue scraped the dry roof of my mouth like sandpaper against an emery wheel.

A raking three-masted schooner was beating out to where the low coral backs of Tosca's Reef lifted their few lonely palms to the straggling mists. With the sunlight gleaming on her drenched bows and her sails catching reflections of deep mauve she looked like a fairy ship sailing a fairy sea.

The quiet breakers, with long, jade-green glossy backs, broke in regular lines on the white sand; and hopping delicately back and forth, always just out of reach of the wash, a hundred gulls prospected listlessly for what the waves might bring.

Suhiti would stew and reek presently, but at that moment it was clean, as in the dawn all things are clean. I felt ashamed.

I looked down at MacGrath, the evil genius of that night. His coat was gone, and one shirt-sleeve had been violently taken too; but with his sandy head pillowed on his bare arm he slept, breathing gently and regularly as a child. His appearance of innocence and comfort was insult added to injury. I shook him roughly.

"Is that your ship?"

He stirred and sat up, staring out to sea, and then he turned on me sleepy eyes with little devils of mischief lurking in their innocent blue depths.

"How should I know?" he demanded. "Must go down to the quay presently. If she's mine, we'll find my dunnage there."

HE got to his hands and knees and crawled back through the silver sand to the shadow of a derelict boat, and in a moment was fast asleep again. I, feeling, and probably looking, the lowest beachcomber south of the line, crawled after him and was asleep almost as soon as he.

His name was Graeme Claverhouse MacGrath, but he was known as plain Mac to anybody who ever did anything in the Archipelago; and as plain Mac he was no-

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My recollection is of the sound of breaking glass, the thud of blows given and taken—and then a blank.

torious in the hundreds of questionable haunts with which, in those days, the Archipelago abounded.

He was tall, lean and loosely strung, the last characteristic giving him an appearance of laziness which could on occasion be very deceptive. His well-shaped head was thatched with a plentiful crop of sandy hair, and of his deeply tanned face the most notable feature was a pair of innocent eyes of a startling and fascinating infantile blue. It was a beautiful blue on immaculate white, which could survive undimmed and undisturbed the smoke of battle up some fever-haunted creek, or the midnight smoke of some mad celebration at the Gabriel Rossetti, which came from time to time when his soul had been starved too long of the incense of battle.

His father would have made him a merchant prince of Glasgow; but, finished with the academy, and set down to learn his trade by snipping little pieces of cloth in the great clean scrubbed warehouse of MacGrath, MacGrath and Brother, he turned eye and ear to the Broomilaw. Finally he allowed his feet to follow where his senses led, and with a home and a comfortable fortune behind him, lost forever, he took service with that Homeless Legion which has so often on far shores "fought in advance of the army and preached ahead of the church."

In those days he was often short of food and always short of coin; for he devoted his attention, almost exclusively, to the sowing of a stout crop of wild oats about the brazen seas and steamy coasts. But in the sowing he picked up much curious knowledge, and a reputation which would stand him in good stead if he ever decided to settle down.

Until we met at Suhiti, that cinder heap of the Sultry Straits, I had managed always to avoid him in his more lurid periods, but he had sworn that sooner or later he would "christen" me thoroughly.

Of the actual christening my recollections are vague and troubled. I believe the orgy started respectably, and on my part with the very best intentions, at the Hotel Gabriel Rossetti. It finished disreputably enough—my recollection is of hot surging darkness, shot through with flashes of light, the sound of breaking glass, the thud of blows taken and given and then a blank, till I awoke at sunrise on the beach.

I WAS roused finally by MacGrath, who prodded without mercy, and sat up to find Yuan Pei-fu standing beside us. His rickshaw, with its uniformed boy squatting beside it, stood a few yards away, and very obviously Yuan himself had slept virtuously during the past night and had never in his life been the worse for liquor.

I was embarrassed, for Yuan owned most of the undertakings in the Islands from which money could be made. He held in his delicate yellow fingers threads of diplomacy, intrigue and war, which ran to Tokyo, Pekin, Sydney and even sometimes to that old gray mother of wisdom, London herself. More important than that he was a Chinese gentleman whose ancestry carried back to the shadows before the Tsin dynasty. I had dined with him more than once, discussing with him weightily across coffee-cups the improvement of the world; it was not nice to confront him thus, squatted like a poor white in a native compound.

I should not have been surprised had he stirred me delicately with his foot, but cool beneath a wide-brimmed straw hat trimmed with green silk, he bowed and wished me good morning with utter unconcern.

"Pull yourself together, and for God's sake stop looking as if you want to cry," MacGrath begged. "Yuan from the Land of Chrysanthemums has got a job for us."

"He's got no job for me," I said. "I shall presently return to my decent hotel, bath, and have tiffin. I shall then try to forget I have ever known you."

"A wise decision, Mr. Matheson," Yuan Pei-fu murmured. "Adventures are to the adventurous."

I was annoyed for no reason at all, unless because my head was aching abominably again; but MacGrath prevented a reply.

"Our friend," he told me sadly, getting to his feet and dragging me up with him, "swears by the souls of his ancestors that last night, when the bowl was flowing, I promised to take command of the *Emma*, bound this morning for foreign parts. I can't deny the charge, though it doesn't sound like me to start work. As the *Emma* is spitting steam and impatience alongside his jetty with my kit thoughtfully put aboard, I'd better be going. Coming?"

What maggot was it invaded my aching head? I'm not particularly thin-skinned, but Yuan Pei-fu's "Adventures are to the adventurous" rankled.

"How long will you be away?" I asked.

"Six weeks or so—Les Veuves, Blue Reefs and so on. There'll be time to write a note for Ito, and if you feel the *Times* may go broke while you're away, you can cable."

I may as well admit here that I have not an adventurous disposition. I was in the south from pure laziness. I love the good glad sun, the physical and mental ease, the lack of convention and artificial restraint to be found among the Islands. Fate in the shape of desperately energetic forebears, has endowed me with the wherewithal to do as I please where I please; and though in those days I pretended to preserve my self-respect by acting as "Our own Correspondent" to a journal, not the *Times*, it really mattered to nobody very much whether I was in Suhiti or Valparaiso, Magellan or Herschel Island—or indeed whether I were alive or dead.

MacGrath observed me with the good-natured contempt of a big brother for a very small one.

"You're not gun-running?" I said.

His eyebrows lifted.

"What nasty minds newspaper people have!" he murmured to Yuan Pei-fu. "Even making allowance for his state—"

"There will be no gun-running, Mr. Matheson," Yuan assured me. "A little smuggling perhaps—a very little."

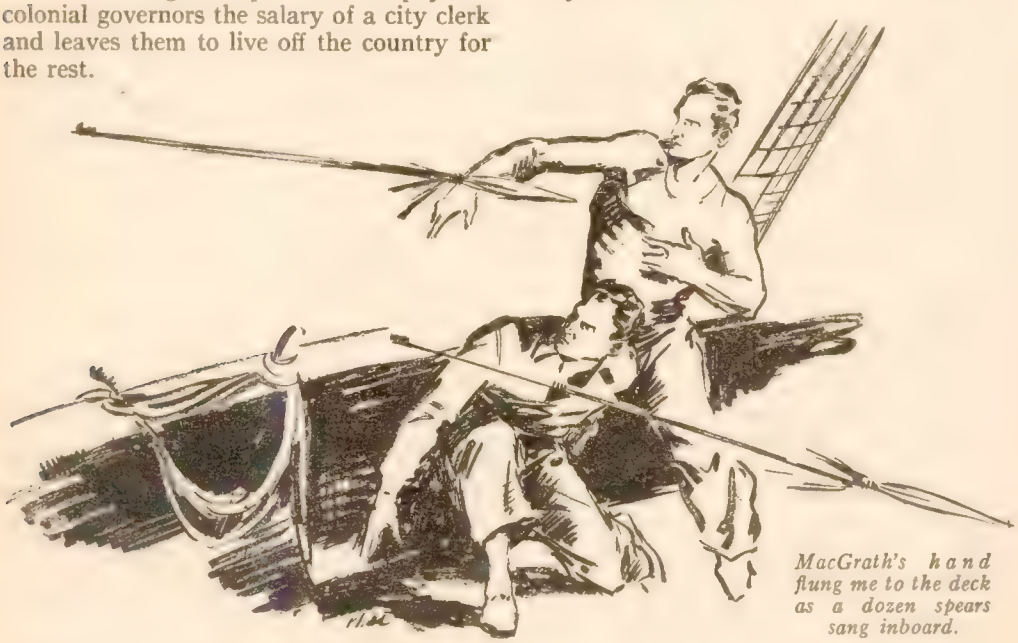
"I'll go if you permit me," I said, little knowing to what a trail of battle and murder I was committing myself.

Yuan was honored. He assured me of the fact in his most felicitous English, and dismissing his rickshaw he started to walk with us toward Suhiti.

TO reach our destination, we were compelled to cut through a segment of the respectable European quarter. Before we reached its white bungalows and vine-cov-

ered trellises, I removed what I could of the evidences of the night's debauch. MacGrath pretended to be too case-hardened to care, and to Yuan Pei-fu it was emphatically a matter of complete indifference whether we were clothed or not.

Suhiti belongs to a power which pays its colonial governors the salary of a city clerk and leaves them to live off the country for the rest.



MacGrath's hand flung me to the deck as a dozen spears sang inboard.

At the corner of the Avenida da Silva, just as we thought we had escaped undiscovered by white men, we ran into the pompous figure of the governor. He was in undress uniform but closely attended by two marvelously attired orderlies. Yuan bowed and we would have passed on, but His Excellency waved a clublike and imperative arm, and we halted.

I knew Suhiti fairly well, but until that morning I had somehow missed meeting its governor, and after one glance I knew that I had missed nothing pleasant.

His face appeared to have been built up of lost parts, and he hauled off his helmet to give us a good view. A heavy forehead provided a sort of penthouse roof for little swinish washed-out blue eyes. His nose, ludicrously short and sharp-pointed, seemed to have been cut out by accident—a slip of the carver's tool. His upper lip, short and clean shaved, was lost behind the lower. A long square, projecting chin like that of a ventriloquist's marionette completed a picture that even a drunken caricaturist would scarcely have dared to perpetrate.

He was of medium height and very gross. His great chest heaved and panted from the exertion of walking from the town hall, though the cool had not gone out of the dawn. His face, a rich mottled purple, ran with perspiration.

"Well, Yuan, have you been salvaging so early?"

His English was good. Yuan, the perfect gentleman, bowed again.

"I have been, Excellency, to call upon these my very good friends. Captain MacGrath commands my ship. Mr. Matheson you have heard of, if you have not met."

The Governor hauled a camera from a capacious pocket and calmly snapped us.

"The next time you write to the English papers, tell the truth," he remarked, turning vindictive eyes on me. "The very next lie you write, I'll send this photograph to every newspaper in London."

"I'm not conscious of ever having written a lie."

"No—you English never do. You distort facts, which is worse." His eyes flamed.

"I'll have you know that whatever your mealy-mouthed government can do in other parts of the world, in these islands she's nothing. If I want your head tomorrow, I'll have it, and you'll be dead and rotten long before the world outside knows anything about it."

He turned on Yuan Pei-fu.

"Why do you take this beach-sweeping for a captain? If you had told me you

wanted a man, I could have got you one of my own."

"I have been waiting many months to persuade Captain MacGrath to take service with me," Yuan replied. "He consented only last night. I would rather have him command a vessel of mine than any man known to me either inside or outside the Archipelago."

MacGrath's lazy length seemed to be leaning against an invisible pillar. I grew desperately afraid that he would lean presently against the angry pro-consul and get us all summarily executed.

"Well?" His Excellency demanded. I detected a half snarl which showed he was doing his damndest to be civil to Yuan under difficulties.

YUAN made no answer and the purple face of His Excellency darkened.

"If you must have the sailor, why mix yourself up with his friend? I told you my business was not for the whole Archipelago to shout about and you introduce it to a—reporter."

"*Reporter* is good, Excellency," Mac chuckled, twining himself yet more comfortably about his invisible support. "Reporter touches him on the raw and teaches him his littleness. The fact is that Matheson is related to me on the mother's side. I'm responsible for him, more or less. He's been drinking heavily lately as you can see from his face. That information is given free to go with the photograph and believe me Matheson will die before he gives you an excuse to let them loose in England."

The jaw of the angry pro-consul flapped up and down loosely once or twice. Then he turned away from the smiling blue eyes.

Yuan closed the interview with dignity.

"Your Excellency's business is in my hands. I have worked in my life on many jobs—with strange tools—for queer clients. I have never bungled a job; I have seldom mistaken my tools, and I have never betrayed a client."

The Governor plodded away, and we resumed our journey. Yuan was silent for a space and then, making the appropriate gesture, he emitted the expletive which in the Archipelago expresses contempt too deep for speech.

"*Tfui!*"

We found the *Emma*. In appearance she was senile. Ragged rope fenders hung at bow and beam of her black hull, making her look a very slattern among sea chars. She flew the flag of some petty independent Sultanate where Yuan—doubtless for very sufficient reasons—had chosen to register her. Upon her grimy smokestack she bore for house badge a rather sinister-looking yellow hand, with fingers half closed and claw-like.

Waddling about the sea lanes of the Islands at a prosaic ten knots, she was the last thing you would think of looking at twice. I discovered later that under pressure of circumstances she could come pretty close to doubling that speed. Her cargo capacity was not great but she seemed to require no more draught than a rowboat.

She had a crew which would not have disgraced a man o' war and, nicely concealed, an armory in keeping with her crew. Altogether, like some other servants of Yuan Pei-fu, she was not all she seemed.

We went down together to the saloon and a white-jacketed Chinese steward served coffee. This we sipped while Yuan gave MacGrath his instructions.

We had general cargo aboard for Port Peace in Les Veuves, provisions for the lighthouse on the western reef of the Sharks and a charter to collect from Seloa in the Blue Reefs. All plain sailing. But we had also to call at the Twins, the two rocky islands west of Atapu.

WE were to leave the Twins toward nightfall on the twenty-fifth of the month, on a course as if returning to Suhiti. Immediately darkness fell we were to proceed at maximum speed, without lights, to a point which they checked very carefully on the chart. The approach was difficult, Yuan said, but by the time he got there MacGrath would know the capacity of his vessel. For the rest, the serang knew the coast like the back of his hand.

"This," Yuan said, "is the Governor's business. At three in the morning you will be signaled—one red light followed by two green. The third light will be shown till your boat runs ashore and you will bring off three cases. I don't know what the cases contain. I don't inquire. His Excellency does not rely upon his government for the means of livelihood, but that is his affair. I understand you may have trouble before you get the cases aboard; possible, but unlikely. What action you take in that event I leave to your discretion, but the cargo must be collected, and you must be clear of the coast by daylight."

"And if the signals are not shown?"

The Malay's body swayed back and forth as the torrent of his speech ebbed and swelled. More than once I thought he would fling himself at MacGrath's throat.

"Wait as long as will enable you to insure you are not seen off-shore at dawn. Is all clear, Captain?"

There was a caress in that "Captain;" and MacGrath, who was taking over his first command, looked as if he might purr. But he had a bone to pick first.

"I notice Woh-fen is steward here, Yuan. Does that mean I am watched?"

Woh-fen was known in Suhiti as the behind-the-scenes right-hand man of Yuan Pei-fu. He filled whatever rôle was required of him—an unobtrusive cook, an unobtrusive clerk. Rumor credited him with every crime in the service of his master from perjury to murder.

Yuan rose. "I did not know till after midnight that you would command my ship, Captain. If you object to Woh-fen he shall leave with me."

Mac's cheery smile broke up the obstinate lines of his lean face.

"That's all right then; let him stay."

As Yuan Pei-fu climbed the companionway MacGrath asked casually:

"By the way, what's happened to Captain Piggott?"

Yuan paused and stared impassively down at our upturned faces.

"He died about twelve hours ago—of what is not certain," he remarked grimly. "It had become necessary, most unfortunately, to have him watched."

MacGrath, chuckling with amusement, followed his owner on deck. I have confessed to having little taste for adventuring. I stayed where I was, chewing over Yuan Pei-fu's parting words, and realizing that I should look a quite impossible fool if I called off from the trip.

CHAPTER II

THE voyage outward passed without incident and with much comfort, for the *Emma* was a well-found craft and Woh-fen a truly excellent steward.

The old ship was heavily manned with Bugis deck hands. The captain's cabin was lined with modern rifles padlocked in racks and there was a plentiful supply of ammunition in a cleverly contrived well under the cabin table. Cleverly contrived, but once I had discovered it, a match dropped anywhere in the cabin sent my heart into my mouth, for there was enough leashed power in those metal-lined cases to blow the *Emma* to atoms.

The engine-room remained for me a mystery. It was presided over by a half caste answering to the names of David Llewelyn Jones. He was emaciated of face and body. He spoke a mad *bêche de mer,* with a Welsh accent, and cursed fluently in every language under heaven. He was one of the pitifully few exceptions to the rule that mixed marriages throw always to the worst faults of both sides. To look at him, you would not have admitted him an exception. Seeing his gray torso stuck in the engine-room hatch, you might not have been disposed to admit his humanity at all. But David Llewelyn Jones, son of a clergyman

gone native, and a brown princess out of the fighting north, was one in a million.

Day after day we waddled on under a blue sky across a blazing sea. Night after night we wandered over a whispering sea with a trail of sea fire in our wake.

MacGrath, lying in a chair on the bridge, or occasionally making a silent prowl round the decks in his rope-soled shoes, seemed to take no interest in anything. Yet I could point to nothing neglected.

At the ports we touched to off-load or load he appeared to do nothing beyond lean over the bridge rail and smoke his pipe, but stevedores sweated mightily under his mild blue eyes and I knew from the attitude of the *Emma's* crew, that they had no doubts of the efficiency of their new master.

"My dear man," he murmured once, stretching himself luxuriously, "if there's really something to do, do it, but don't spend yourself more than necessary on the job and above all don't hunt trouble."

"Well, if you don't look for work you're not likely to find it," I murmured vaguely, hunting through my pockets for matches.

MacGrath tossed me his box, chuckling.

"Who's the poet fellow they make a fuss of at home—Kipps or something? 'Take up the white man's burden.' Have you noticed the white and the near-white in these latitudes taking up the burden and skinning the brown man in the process?"

"You've all the virtues yourself, of course," I countered unhappily, guessing what was coming.

"I claim no virtues, so don't come up for judgment," he said equably. "What I'm trying to get at is the state of mind that causes you, and thousands like you, to spout and scrawl claptrap by the mile about our civilizing mission."

"Just one damned article," I protested. "Don't we civilize—bring churches, schools, sanitation, progress, wherever we go?"

HE blew a cloud of smoke through the darkness up to the smiling stars.

"You bring churches, hence the child of nature starts to wear pants—trade for Manchester. You bring schools, teach the child of nature to want art—trade for Birmingham and Sheffield. You bring sanitation—jobs for building and sewage contractors. You bring progress accompanied by gin—profits for the distillers. You bring disease—jobs for the medical profession. All this you do, my dear Matheson, and withal you like to be clean and cool in your nice white ducks. You wield the pen of an empire-builder and you shudder at the sight of blood. You spout about toil, and mentally and physically you are about the laziest devil unhung."

"Great heavens," I groaned, "why this attack? I didn't make the system."

"No—but you talk flapdoodle about those who do, and sometimes the whole flaming hypocritical business makes me sick. If I didn't like you, personally, rather a lot, I'd sling you overboard. Let's go down for a nightcap and turn in."

It was in railing talks like these that we passed the brazen days and velvet nights prosaically enough, but as the sun dropped toward the west on the afternoon of the twenty-fifth we stood out from the Twins headed for Suhiti.

After nightfall the lights were screened and the *Emma's* bows swung to the northeast. There is a suggestion of lawlessness about doused lights and colored beach signals and, as the swift twilight faded into dark, a mildly pleasurable excitement began to stir my pulses.

We had supper and let an hour or two slip by. Then MacGrath brought a rifle up to the bridge and filled a few clips with ammunition.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"Matter of precaution," he answered casually. "If you're worried about your journalistic reputation, there's room to hide among the oil-cans in the forepeak."

"You're a scurrilous swine," I shouted, and thereafter there was no sound but the sleepy wash of the sea, the steady beat of the engines and at intervals the low call of the lookout in the bows.

POSSIBLY MacGrath in pursuance of his philosophy slept. Twice he roused himself to look at the compass and murmur a remark to the helmsman, but after each effort he collapsed in his long chair again. He must have calculated nicely though, for presently his voice carried across the desk:

"O Tuala!"

Bare feet shuffled up the companionway and the old serang Tuala stood, a lean shadow, by his master's side.

"It is time, Tuala. I give the ship into your hands. See you keep her safe. When you are inside the reefs call me."

"She is safe, Tuan. My son and my son's son watch in the bows. Apart from their own honor, they know the wrath of Tuala."

Silence fell again, but broken now by low calls from the lookout and the muffled jangle of the engine-room telegraph, as Tuala eased the ship round an invisible bend or rushed her forward against a set of the tide.

Leaning over the rail, I caught sometimes a ghostly phosphorescent flash where the sea swirled about a jagged needle of coral within a yard of our bows. More than once I heard the burble of shoal water under our counter and braced myself for the shock. But MacGrath lay undisturbed and the withered profile of Tuala stooped impassive over the whirling wheel.

"We are in deep water, Tuan, and there is time to spare."

"It is well done, Tuala. Is the boat crew standing by?"

"Ya, Tuan."

"Call me when the lights are shown."

TUALA came and stood at my side, peering into the darkness. Shoreward there was no light to be seen, nothing to indicate there was land anywhere, except a formless deeper darkness on the night, which might have been the loom of hills inland.

"Tuan!"

A red light flashed in the distance, remained steady for a moment, and disappeared. A green light—another—and MacGrath was galvanized into very active life.

"Get your crew away, Tuala, and remember if there's trouble, we want the cargo, not heads. Like to go, Matheson?"

There was a queer note in his voice. After all he didn't know me very well and I divined he had his finger on my spiritual pulse. There were few places I wanted less to visit than that dark shore where the green light gleamed like a vicious eye, but I thanked him as eagerly as I could manage, and took the revolver he slipped into my hand.

"*Quick's* the word—we've no time to lose."

The boat went down to the water without a sound and as I sat in the sternsheets beside Tuala I reflected that there was deadly efficiency behind my crazy Scot's philosophy of the conservation of energy. God alone knew how long he would stand the trammels of a definite job, but it seemed to me that nothing could stand long in his way if he gave his mind to moving it.

We grounded gently on the beach and as I scrambled out of the boat an electric torch flashed in my face and instantly switched out again.

"From Yuan Pei-fu?" somebody asked.

"Yes," I answered irritably, for the sudden glare in my eyes had caused me to jump. "It's surely dark enough to save your face without blinding me as well. Where's your cargo?"

The light flashed just long enough to disclose three packing-cases lying in a row, looking most unpleasantly like coffins. Tuala tested their weight, and upon a muttered order the men began carrying them down to the boat.

I sensed, rather than saw, that there were men standing about, and I sensed also that the man holding the torch was as nervous as a cat in a kennel. His breath came in short gasps. Standing beside him in the black dark, with no sound but the dreamy wash of the sea and the scarcely perceptible shuffle of the *Emma's* crew moving the cases down to the water, the hair stirred on my scalp and my unpracticed fingers closed on the revolver-butt in my pocket.

"A good night's work," came in a panting whisper; and I had a sickening feeling that he included me as his companion in some awful villainy. "A very good night's work. His Excellency should be grateful."

I grunted.

"And time he showed his gratitude," the scared, unhappy voice nagged on. "It's easy for you, but for me there is danger—always the danger. What do you get?"

I wanted to kick that chattering shade.

"Nothing," I answered shortly.

"Aha—you too are one he holds by a string. Poor devils! The islands are full of them, and not one with the nerve to slit his fat throat."

"Ready, Tuan!"

I slipped away, inexpressibly glad to be clear of a man I hated and despised without having had so much as a glimpse of his face; and presently I crouched precariously by Tuala while he plied his oar paddlewise over the stern, and little trails of fire showed where our crew, kris in mouth, swam cheerfully in our wake.

IN silence the cases were hauled aboard and stowed on the forehatch. The boat was hoisted in and without a word Tuala hastened to his place at the wheel. We swung in the blind darkness and began to thread our way, mysteriously as we had come, through the maze of reefs.

MacGrath was in his chair again and I was explaining how simple had been our task when there broke out a sudden storm

of yelling from the shore. A revolver spoke twice, and there followed a long-drawn cry for help—addressed, I was sure, to us. The cry broke on a staccato note of agony and mortal terror. Then utter silence.

I knew that voice. A few minutes before I had longed to kick its owner; and now —for there was no mistaking the meaning of that final cry—he was beyond the reach of the Governor's gratitude, beyond caring who kicked. . . . . The *Emma* crept on.

Tuala's grandson came padding back from the bows and whispered excitedly to the serang. The old man stepped to the rail and peered into the darkness.

"There is a war-boat of many paddles across the course, Tuan. What is your desire?"

The skipper sprang to his side and the two seamen conferred in a common language beyond my comprehension. While they talked the *Emma* just held her way against the incoming tide.

"Ram her," MacGrath decided; and Tuala, with a grunt of satisfied agreement, swung the wheel spokes in his bony, competent hands.

"Hang it all, man," I protested, "you can't run about the high seas sinking whatever may get in your way. That's murder."

"Considering you write for the only truly jingo paper in Great Britain, you're amazingly mealy-mouthed, my son," MacGrath chuckled, thrusting the engine-room indicator over with a snap. "Hold tight."

I gripped the bridge rail as the *Emma,* swerving wildly to port, gave me her first demonstration of that turn of speed which she exercised only on very special occasions, when it was unnecessary or inexpedient to maintain the harmless character certified by her bluff commercial exterior.

Screams of rage and defiance rose in the darkness. The *Emma* shuddered as the war boat split on her iron stem. The cries swept by on either side of us. MacGrath's hand caught me and flung me to the deck as a dozen spears sang inboard, burying their razor heads all over the bridge deck.

"Thanks," I muttered later, getting to my feet cautiously and a little breathlessly.

MacGrath set the engine-room bell jangling for slow speed again and the *Emma* resumed her tortuous crawl through the reefs.

"A little thing like that happens up the creeks of these islands every day of the week," he said cheerfully. "That's why I invited you. A little practical experience for the journalist of the White Man's burden. We loot these miserable blighters and they have the infernal cheek to attack us. I tell you the white man's burden is a good deal heavier than you 'reporters' think!"

Sounds of riot broke the silence aft, and MacGrath was gone from the bridge like a flash. Following more cautiously, for I had a landsman's neck which I had no desire to break, I found him examining, by the light of a lantern, a dripping native, whose face was one of the finest studies of hate and baffled fury I have ever met. He was babbling furiously through foam-flecked lips, while he struggled impotently under the iron hands of three of our crew, one of whom was bleeding from a long gash across the chest for which presumably the unwilling guest was responsible.

MacGrath asked him a question or two but he might as usefully have argued with a charging buffalo. The native writhed and heaved, while the perspiration dripped from the three panting deck hands.

"All right, my son, sleep on it," MacGrath said. "Perhaps you'll talk sense in the morning."

The prisoner, fighting every inch of the way, was forced at length down the forecastle hatch. MacGrath held up his lantern and examined me with whimsical eyes.

"You'd better turn in and salve your law-abiding soul with sleep," he said. "You're having the devil of an outing, aren't you?"

CHAPTER III

AFTER breakfast the following morning —the same morning, to be strictly accurate—MacGrath had his chair brought aft where there was more space to be dignified than on the *Emma's* lilliputian bridge. Our prisoner was brought up, closely guarded by two sturdy deck hands.

He was, by daylight, with his emotions more or less under control, a fine specimen, with good features and the big gentle brown eyes of his race. Somebody had given him a sarong of broad red and white stripes from which his copper torso stood out like a statue. He looked subdued, but as a wild horse is temporarily tamed—ready to break loose at a whisper.

Standing behind MacGrath's chair, I forgot the discomfort of the boiling sun, but my knowledge of the language is limited and I was soon hopelessly bogged. The Malay's brown eyes blazed and his body

"No trace of breath, no sign of a heart-beat. But the dead don't look like that, Matheson."

swayed back and forth in sympathy as the torrent of his speech ebbed and swelled. More than once I thought he would fling himself at MacGrath's throat; the guards stood poised and alert on either side.

MacGrath was immobile, his face shaded by the wide brim of his panama. At last he held up his hand. The torrent of words ceased and the native stood with his brown arms folded across his breast, eyes cast with deceptive submissiveness at the sailor's feet.

"Follow it?" MacGrath asked, glancing over his shoulder, and as I shook my head he added, "Ever hear of L'lalla? The Flower of Atapu, they call her."

I SUPPOSE everybody in the Archipelago had heard tales of the haughty beauty who seemed to have the mysterious isle by the ears. But they were stories only, for Atapu did not encourage the white. The harbors of the coast were uncharted and more than one ship, mysteriously missing, was put to the account of one or other of the princes who ruled the forbidden shore. Nominally the island belonged to the Suhiti group, but since the Protectorate Power had not strength nor courage to enforce its will, and the Great Powers were too jealous to interfere, Atapu remained one of the last mysterious and unexplored lands.

"This fellow, Totuma, claims to have been L'lalla's lover. Apparently everybody who ever sees her is, but he prides himself that he was accepted. Poor devil—it's open to more than doubt, if half the tales are true, but at any rate he believes it himself."

I stared with heightened interest at the dusky *Troilus*. He met my look and returned it arrogantly.

"Damn it, don't annoy the fellow," MacGrath said irritably. "He isn't a zoo. He swears we have his dead bride in one of those cases consigned to the Governor. His tale is that she was abducted by some island riffraff under the orders of a sort of jackal the Governor keeps there for purposes of secret trade—probably your friend who made such an unpleasant noise about dying when we were pulling out last night."

MacGrath spoke in his usual lethargic matter-of-fact tones, but his blue eyes had glints of lightning in their depths.

"Woh-fen," he called to the Chinese who had been standing close by at the galley door, "you are Yuan Pei-fu's man; what touches the honor of Yuan Pei-fu touches you."

Woh-fen nodded, his face as masklike as his master's.

"Open those three cases. I desire to know nothing of what they contain unless this tale be true."

THE steward slipped away; and watching MacGrath, my heart warmed to that queer strayed soul I was learning to know better in those few days of shipboard intercourse, than I could have done in years of chance fellowship ashore.

My flesh tingled a little too, for I realized that Woh-fen's report might release a devil in the Scot. Contraband was all very well; he would drive with the greatest cheerfulness through all the laws national or international that were ever got to parchment.

But abduction—and abduction for such a thing as the Governor of Suhiti—phew!

When Woh-fen came back, there was an enigmatic smile on his lips, and his eyes were mere slits.

"That fellah tale him right," he reported. "In case No. E.365 one damfine female of Atapu, and she all same dead. In other two cases—ah—ah—island stuff. In case No. E.365 one damfine female allee same dead," he repeated, his voice dropping to a thin whisper like the breath of wind in dry reeds. "For that I think Yuan Pei-fu cut out somebody's heart—yes."

MacGrath got slowly to his feet and walked forward. Totuma and I followed at his heels. The lid of one of the cases was off, and in it lay a girl, her beautiful face framed in masses of dark hair, the roses blooming duskily behind the honey pallor of her skin. Her arms were folded negligently across her body. She might have been sleeping, but there was no stir of breathing under the green kerchief that covered her breast, and the white sarong reaching to her shapely ankles fell into grave-cloth folds.

Totuma dropped at the foot of that case like one dead.

MacGrath took the girl's slender wrist; he lifted an eyelid and peered into the sightless eye, put an ear to her breast and listened long. At last he rose.

"No trace of breath, no sign of a heartbeat, and she's cold. But the dead don't look like that, Matheson. The case is ventilated, too, and that beast isn't the sort to buy a corpse."

HE touched the Malay's bare brown shoulder, and the man stood up. He seemed to realize that we were his friends, and there was no revolt in the brown eyes which searched MacGrath's face.

"She's not dead," MacGrath said, speaking the dialect slowly. "What they have done to her I do not know, but she shall suffer no more hurt."

Totuma said nothing, but his gesture was eloquent of despair.

"She shall be covered again," the sailor continued. "Until we come to Suhiti, you shall guard her day and night. Once there, you can do nothing more; it will be work for white men. Trust L'lalla to us then; if men can do it, you shall have her safe—L'lalla safe and a fit vengeance for dowry."

Hope, doubt, a flood of wild passions, were reflected in Totuma's eyes.

"I, MacGrath, have taken it upon me," the sailor vowed, drawing himself up suddenly to his full height. And that castaway Scot, in his crumpled whites and battered panama, was clothed in dignity and power.

Totuma touched his hand.

"A little water I will take lest life perish. I will eat again when the Tuan gives the Flower to me alive."

So L'lalla was covered in her box again; Totuma, a naked kris lying across his knees, seated himself cross-legged at her feet.

MACGRATH went about the ship as if nothing had happened. What he felt, I could only guess, and somehow I didn't like to broach the subject till he should raise it himself. For myself, I confess that I had at last to drift aft and imperil my eyesight gazing into the flying quicksilver of our wake; only thus could I keep my eyes from the coffin-like box and the savage statuesque figure at its foot.

And we had days of it—days in which Totuma sat, apparently sleepless, from baking noon to sweltering midnight, at the shrine of his love. And the *Emma* crawled across the brazen sea uneasily, as if overburdened by her mysterious freight.

We raised the flat backs of the Toscas at last, and as we doubled the buoy into the fairway of the main channel a swift launch shot out and ranged up to hailing distance. It flew the ensign of the protectorate power and standing aft in spotless ducks with a broad scarlet sash about his bulky middle was the Governor.

Our own ensign dipped in salute; and MacGrath, leaning over the bridge rail, answered the Governor's summons with a brief, "All's well."

"No trouble at all?"

"None worth mention, Your Excellency."

The launch flashed away shoreward, and as we sagged into the wash of her wake, MacGrath smiled gently.

Afternoon was well advanced when we ran into Suhiti harbor and found Yuan Pei-fu waiting, as was his custom, at our private jetty. The gangplank was lowered for him to come aboard. It was lifted again the moment his foot touched the deck, and no further communication with the shore was allowed till he had taken over the ship's papers and departed. That was the invariable rule. Yuan Pei-fu frequently had business which was not for the eyes and ears of every casual longshoreman.

He came straight aft to the cabin, and

we took seats about the little table. Woh-fen placed cups of coffee before us.

"Is all well, Captain?"

"All well, Yuan. There was a little unpleasantness at Atapu. I rather think one of the Governor's representatives died of it. We had to sink a war-boat on our way out through the reefs, but we have our cargo as arranged. I was not told that I was to expect passengers from Atapu."

"Ah—so you have passengers, Captain? Proceed. I noticed a strange figure in a bizarre pose on the forehatch."

"One Totuma, who came aboard as we were leaving Atapu. He could not bear to be parted from the Governor's contraband. But he is not our only passenger."

YUAN drank his coffee and clapped his hands for Woh-fen to refill the cup. With his elbows on the table, hands propping his chin, his bright unwinking eyes fastened on MacGrath's face, he looked more than usually like an idol carved in old ivory.

"Enough circumlocution, Captain. You and I, I hope, will meet the unexpected together more than once before the fates call us home. The plain tale is best."

MacGrath handed over his papers and began his story. Yuan gave no sign, but I had an uncanny impression that he was growing larger and larger as the tale proceeded. And the picture of the plain white paneled cabin, with a ray of the setting sun throwing a yellow bar of dancing motes through the skylight, will remain with me.

Almost as the tale ended, the brief tropic twilight dropped into black dark, as if Yuan's increasing bulk had blotted out the last of the light. The clap of his hands summoning Woh-fen to light the lamp stiffened the hair on my scalp.

Out of the darkness his voice came low, but with a hiss at the back of it like fire behind a wall of ice.

"So—this barbarian—this unfathered offspring of a nation without a past—would use me, Yuan Pei-fu, for his filthy work! For that, and for the peace of my fathers who turn in their tombs beneath the fadeless blossoms, he dies."

Woh-fen brought the lamp and slipped silently away.

"This is my work," MacGrath said, "mine, and if he wishes, Matheson's. While I command for you, your honor is mine. The Governor may die; perhaps he may live to wish I had been merciful enough to kill him. Listen."

I listened while MacGrath eyed me quietly from moment to moment as if taking my measure. But I met his eyes, and when he had finished, I managed to say with some semblance of cheerfulness:

"I'm with you—wouldn't be out of it for anything."

Yuan nodded his head approvingly.

"Adventures are to the adventurous, Mr Matheson. I am afraid you are getting more than you bargained for. It might be well to think twice. For me the petty laws of the barbarous West mean nothing; for Captain MacGrath they mean certainly no more. For you, the representative of the very respectable western bourgeoisie—"

"Oh, dammit, Yuan!" I protested.

"Very well, Captain; it is as you wish. I shall be with the *Emma* off the Governor's landing at the hour fixed. And in the meantime—whether His Excellency lives or dies—I will take steps to see that there is a new ruler of Suhiti by sunrise tomorrow."

I stared at Yuan and he answered my surprise with a shrug.

"Mr. Matheson, if I could not do that when necessary, I could not live here at all."

CHAPTER IV

IF you have never gone upon a journey lying stiffly in the inky gloom of a coffin, you cannot appreciate the feeling of helplessness involved, and there is in the tropics the very maximum of discomfort attaching to an experiment of the sort.

The Governor's three cases had been removed to Yuan Pei-fu's warehouse, and it was there that at the appointed time we said farewell to Totuma and the Chinese, and submitted to being nailed down in the cases from which the contraband goods had been removed.

MacGrath went into his box first, and he chuckled up at the face I was working hard to keep unconcerned and cheerful.

"Superstitious people would call this tempting Providence," he said. "You're looking mighty superstitious. Remember—hang tight to your nerves. They'll take some holding in the dark. Don't stir till you hear from me. A mistake, and these are our coffins in solemn earnest."

The cases were loaded on a four-wheeled cart, one above the other, mine in the middle, and the journey to the residency began. It was true, I reflected as we jolted on our way, my lid was only tacked down

and could be lifted with one good push—but more than once I was sorely tempted to make quite certain of that fact!

Dripping with perspiration and half suffocated, I recalled that Yuan Pei-fu was an Oriental of whom I knew practically nothing. No European could hope to divine the thoughts playing behind his inscrutable mask.

Suppose after all that scene in the cabin had been a gigantic farce? If Yuan and the Governor were in the conspiracy together, wasn't it the natural line for a clever devil like that to take? To listen sympathetically to MacGrath's plans, to fall in with them, and when we were safely in the boxes, an extra rivet or two would be the end of us. I had a vision of him watching with his faint, supercilious smile while Woh-fen screwed those rivets home.

How did we know where we were going? What would be easier than to march us back aboard the *Emma?* An hour's steaming, and the stars, those gorgeous southern stars I loved so well, might smile as two packing-cases were dumped negligently into the Pacific! I wondered what the last mad moments would feel like when the water poured through the air-holes.

Partial choking I experienced already. My nerves went to tatters suddenly, and I was flung into a panic, in desperate combat with which I presently grew calm.

Muffled through the vent-holes, I heard the challenge of the Governor's guard. A minute later the cart came to a halt. There was a bustle outside. White pencils of light pierced my case blindingly as a lantern moved backward and forward. There was scraping, as the box above was removed, and then I felt myself borne aloft on the shoulders of the porters, and knew by the motion that we were climbing stairs. Anyhow, we were not to be drowned.

My case was set down, and I heard the Governor's thick, furry tones.

"Ah, Yuan, my friend, so you have brought my little treasures safe as usual. No trouble, I hope?"

Yuan was perfect. I could fancy the upward tilt of his chin, the gleaming light of the shuttered eyes.

"There was no trouble, Your Excellency. Your treasures are, I trust, in perfect condition. I pray your gods may smile on your trading."

Silence, while, I supposed, the papers were being signed, and then the voice of the Governor bidding Yuan good-night.

The door closed, and a tight-fitting key ground in the lock with a threatening squeal which set my heart beating again. Something tapped the board above my head, and hands brushed backward and forward across it. Heavens, was the man going to try me first? I pressed my knuckles against the lid. Should I spring out and take my chance? But Mac's orders had been imperative; I waited, every nerve quivering.

"Case No. E.365—that's it," the Governor spoke his own language. "Come, Elise, my pet—help me with the lid."

ELISE? She was the man's wife. I remembered seeing the queer, subdued, dried-up little woman once, at some function in the English colony when her husband was absent nursing a diplomatic indisposition. Into what pit of infamy had we thrust ourselves?

I heard the creak of boards being lifted, and then the Governor's voice again.

"Ah—see her, Elise, the Flower of Atapu, the wonderful L'lalla, to whom the kings and rajahs and the millionaires of Araby bow down! She is wonderful, isn't she? A scornful one—a clever one. She has been scornful even to your Henri. You will teach her better than that, my pet—no?"

For some moments I heard only indistinct shuffling sounds, and I made out that the baboon was padding to and fro across the room. Then his voice again.

"Did you ever see the like, Elise? See that face—a poet's dream; those breasts—an artist's reverie. Look at the little feet, a sculptor's despair. How the calves swell from those ankles. How—"

I sweated and choked, but the voice came again with savage cruelty in its silkiness.

"Strange what the years do, Elise, my pet. To think that once you were almost as beautiful as she! Do you remember a night when the oranges were hanging thick before harvest? I called you Helen, didn't I? Helen—my pet! There would be few to march Troyward for Helen now."

The swine—the unutterable swine! Would MacGrath have the patience to bide his time?

The woman did not answer, but I heard the clink of glasses, and the rustle of her dress as she passed close by me.

"So—yes, the glass, Elise. Just a little on the lips first. Careful, fool! See how your hand shakes. I swear you grow too old even for work. That's better—a little more now. Aha! Her eyelids flutter, I

MacGrath caught him below the knees. The mountain of flesh swayed for a moment; then the pro-consul crashed to the floor.

think. Just a little drop and—yes, she breathes. He was a wizard, the man Forgas, who sold me this! Now she will sleep like a little child and wake hungry as a Diana rested after the chase. Take her feet now, and we will put her on the couch."

There was a shuffling of slippered feet, and then once more the odious furry voice.

"What a beauty! Ye gods, what a beauty! And tomorrow we shall play, and Oturi will whistle for his money."

Muffled but distinct, I heard MacGrath's cry: *"Now!"*

I THRUST upward with all my strength, and sprang out of the box. For a moment the light stabbed at my eyes and I could see nothing. Then I made out the Governor drawn back on his heels like some great surprised beast, his gross face a ghastly mottled purple, his little washed-out blue eyes blazing with amazement and rage. Madam Elise, her face white as paper above her black evening dress, crouched at the foot of the couch on which they had just laid L'lalla.

"Blackmail!" the Governor roared, his great marionette jaw working crazily.

MacGrath caught him below the knees. The amazed mountain of flesh swayed ponderously for a moment or two, and then the pro-consul crashed to the floor, knocking himself senseless in his fall.

My simple duties had been plainly laid down. I had a length of strong light cord in my hand, and it was the work of moments to truss him. MacGrath thrust a homely but effective gag into his mouth; and then, not without some difficulty, we got him into a heavy chair in the middle of the room and lashed him fast.

During these proceedings Madam Elise had remained as we found her, crouched at the couch foot, watching with wide weary eyes, like a sleepwalker staring at a play of phantoms met on a nocturnal walk. MacGrath, having removed the key from the lock, motioned her to a chair at the other end of the room.

"If you are quiet, madam, you have nothing to fear from us. If you try to attract attention, or interfere in any way, I shall be compelled to gag and bind you too."

She walked across the room with a jerky doll-like movement, and her eyes remained wide and apparently unseeing.

MacGrath went first to satisfy himself that L'lalla was alive. Then he brought out from his packing-case a heavy spirit lamp about the wick of which he had improvised a kind of grid. Having lit the wick and set three small irons to heat in the blue flame, he confronted the Governor, who had regained possession of his senses and was struggling in ineffectual desperation with his bonds.

I have known that queer Scot happy and angry, sober and—not quite so sober—in a dozen wayward moods. But the man who stood over the straining bulk of the Governor was a stranger. You couldn't have

said that he looked angry; he was beyond that. He seemed to have eliminated personal feeling.

I think the impression which I got went home to the Governor too. His struggles died away as if paralysis crept upward from his feet. His little eyes dilated, concentrating on the sailor's inexorable face. Anger went out, and pure animal fear crept in to tell the ultimate quality of that sordid soul.

"I have forgotten that you thought to make Yuan Pei-fu, and my friend and me, your panders," MacGrath said slowly. "That's nothing now. It's for what I have heard tonight, and the great deal more I can guess, that I'm going to set marks on you which will remain till you die."

I turned my eyes from the Scot's face, and fell to watching the pulses beating in the Governor's thick neck till the sound of a snatched breath drew my eyes to the corner where Madame Elise sat. She had risen to her feet and stood swaying a little with eyes fastened on MacGrath, who appeared not to have seen her. She moved slowly across the room, and standing at the sailor's side, looked down at her husband. There was color in her withered cheeks, a strange light in her faded gray eyes, and just for a moment I had a glimpse of what she might have been in those far-off days when the animal she was to marry had called her Helen.

The spiritual tension in that overheated room was stretched to breaking point as the woman, moving jerkily still, as if she had lost control of her limbs, walked to the table and lifted the irons one by one from the flame. In her flushed face her eyes danced with fierce emotion. She selected a brand and turned upon her husband.

"Great heavens—not that!" I gasped.

MacGrath's face was like stone.

"Why not? How often do you think she's helped at scenes like tonight's and worse? It's her right."

I HEARD the terrified man's gagged scream as the first iron bit through the skin. Then I shut my eyes till it was over, and the Governor had been branded with the first letter of a word in English, his own tongue and Malay. The words had the same meaning—the brand of a beast.

When it was over and Madame Elise fell back, MacGrath stood a moment above the victim. What further punishment the brute expected, God knows. It was a temptation for a final word at least. But MacGrath swung round and opened the door.

"Take L'lalla," he said to me. "Jump—and remember—first left, down one flight, then sharp right through the glass doors. Whatever you do, keep running; I'll attend to the fighting, if there is any."

I caught up the still unconscious L'lalla and fled. A drowsy native sentry woke with a cry of alarm as I crashed through the glass doors; a second later he yelled with terror as MacGrath dashed in my wake.

And then we were into the galley. Totuma caught L'lalla from me, and I had time to note that MacGrath had brought the Governor's wife away. She crumpled on the bottom boards, her arms clutched about his knees, and as the willing paddles drove us through the moon-touched surf, her voice rose in peal on peal of hysteria.

Tuala met us at the gangway, and as we clambered aboard, Yuan Pei-fu, gloriously cool and detached, was standing by to bow us down the companion to the saloon.

"Subject to your approval, Captain,"—the owner bowed punctiliously,—"I have told the serang to steam a mile from the shore and keep moving in view of the town, till we have discussed the position."

MACGRATH came down, pushing Totuma before him, and the instant we were all assembled, almost as if taking her cue in a tableau, L'lalla yawned sleepily and rose gracefully on one elbow from the settee on which we had laid her. Wondering, but calm, she surveyed us.

She had not been named the Flower of Atapu for nothing. My heart beat faster as the lamplight played on her perfect face, glinted from the gold-dust in her shadowed eyes, touched with wandering tints the raven black of her hair.

She dropped her little feet to the floor; and as she sat up, Totuma, murmuring ecstatically, sprang forward and bowed his head on her knees. She seemed to see him for the first time; the gold of her eyes burst into flame as she spurned him aside.

Instantly calm again, she turned to MacGrath. "If the Tuan commands this ship, the word is with him."

There was something amiss; the dénouement was running awry. The spurning of Totuma was a queer end to our fairy-tale—L'lalla's beautiful face was not that of an unsophisticated maid rescued from a fate beneath words.

The kris flashed as he sprang; but MacGrath's fist dropped him senseless before he could strike.

Yuan Pei-fu sank on a settee, his thin yellow hands folded inside his wide silk sleeves, a faint smile on his thin lips, his black eyes very bright. I, unutterably weary, sank down beside him. Madam Elise sobbed quietly, endlessly, in a bunk in MacGrath's cabin, which opened off the saloon. Totuma crouched on hands and knees at the foot of the companion, watching his love with intent, smoldering eyes.

Only MacGrath remained standing as he began his story to the rescued maid.

She watched his face with steady unwinking eyes, though once or twice a smile seemed to twitch the corners of her mouth.

"That's all, L'lalla," he concluded. "Unwittingly I brought you into danger. By the mercy of Allah, I have brought you out. Totuma is here, and there remains only to take you back to Atapu." His smile widened. "To which court will you go?"

She sat like a queen in judgment. MacGrath was the offender up for judgment.

"Totuma is dirt," she remarked quietly. "If I have made use of him, I have made use also of the ground on which I walk. A word might be spoken to Rajah Oturi, and white ants would do the rest."

I started up at Totuma's scream. The bright kris flashed as he sprang forward; but MacGrath's fist, directed with accuracy and judgment, dropped him senseless before he could strike the fatal blow.

L'lalla had crouched back. She recovered herself instantly.

"Tuan, thou art a man."

The Queen's voice gave quiet, haughty approval. Her eyes did more. She was accustomed to bestow favors and to have whatever she chose to bestow received with gratitude. I sank back by Yuan Pei-fu to watch the play.

"Ya, Tuan—a man, seeing as far as a man. It was of my own accord I went to Suhiti. The stratagem was to avoid the price."

"That can be only a jest, L'lalla," MacGrath protested. "Does the gazelle mate with the boar?"

SHE seemed to consider the position carefully, knowing her standards different from ours, and sensing disapproval in MacGrath's smiling protest. She came and stood before him, beautiful arms crossed over her breast, her dusky head bowed submissively. Then suddenly she flashed up at him the glory of her amazing eyes.

The Scot fell back to lean negligently against a bulkhead. She followed him till he could retreat no more, and stood close.

"Tuan, in this world there are but two things worth fighting for—power and love. The old boar at Suhiti is ruler of many lands. The rulers of Atapu pay him tribute. All the isles of the sea pay him tribute. The fighting chiefs fear him. He has power."

She reached up to lay her hands on the sailor's chest.

"Tuan, you have conquered the old boar; that is your power, and Allah be praised, you are a man a woman can love."

MacGrath was offered a prize rajahs were fighting for, a prize for which millionaire merchants were prepared to beggar themselves; but as her hands touched his shoulders, he slipped aside.

"The honor is great, L'lalla; but I am of the sea and—and married already."

HER eyes blazed molten in a pallid face. She had offered, and for the first time in her life had been rejected—very politely, but firmly.

"That is a lie—but if you had ten wives, what matter? L'lalla is worth a score."

"Nevertheless—"

"For that insult Oturi's white man and the white man's daughter shall pay!"

Her open palm struck him full on the mouth, and before any of us could move, she was up the companion and over the side. We rushed on deck in time to catch the glow of phosphorus as she struck out with sure swift strokes upon the mile-and-a-half swim to Suhiti.

"He probably wont realize it all at once," MacGrath murmured, feeling his mouth tenderly, "but Totuma is well out of that. Sorry to've led you to a mare's nest, Yuan. What will the Governor do, do you think?"

Yuan pointed to where above the fading lights of the town a red lamp glowed with a sinister unwinking fire.

"What the ex-Governor will do I have no idea. He is, I hope, by now plain Mr. da Susa. His Excellency the new governor will be, I hope, my very good friend."

MacGrath laughed happily.

"Oh, Yuan, why did you not find me earlier? I foresee that life will not have many dull moments till you sack me."

"It was very simple," Yuan explained with a deprecatory shrug. "The Protectorate Power is far; its home governors change every six months, and so long as tribute reaches home regularly, they care little who lords it here. I found additional tribute for the powers at home, and ample palm-oil for local application. My—er—candidate did the rest."

CHAPTER V

WE met in the sea-green twilight of Yuan Pei-fu's office on the Rua da Sol. It was my first visit, for though I had known him more or less for some years, our meetings had been at hotels or, very infrequently, at the houses of mutual acquaintances. He had a bungalow in the hills behind the town, but popular report said that only the bedroom was furnished and he went there, when he went at all, to sleep.

I looked about me with interest, for that room had seen many meetings fatal to the party sitting on the wrong side of the desk. It had seen the inauguration of native wars, the making and breaking of mysterious commercial combinations. It had seen the drawing of at least one international document. It had seen the sentence of death passed on—how many?

The floor was carpeted with a blue, silky pile. The ceiling was lofty and over the desk of the master a punkah swept back and forth with a sighing, restful sound.

Packed bookcases about five feet high ran all round the walls—books in all written languages, I should think, and on every subject that man has written usefully about. Above the bookcases the walls were a soft blue, broken by plain panels of white, and in the panels beautifully executed etchings and charcoal drawings—bleak landscapes, savage heads, crouched animals—all with some atmosphere of tragedy about them.

"You like my pictures," Yuan said, bowing us to chairs on either side of the great blackwood desk.

"They are wonderful," I answered, "but heaven, what a tragic collection! How can you sit with them, all day and every day?"

He smiled.

"My friend, all beauty is tragic—true beauty. To be really beautiful, a landscape must be bleak; to be truly beautiful, a face must have been touched by suffering. For man himself, what is there to appreciate in life till he has somewhere, at some time, drunk the dregs of the cup?"

YUAN had laid aside his wide silk-trimmed hat. With his lean yellow fingers locked under his chin, his pale ivory skin criss crossed by a myriad tiny wrinkles, his narrow black eyes twinkling from under the bulge of his massive forehead, he looked like a benevolent image.

There came a tap at the door. Yuan Pei-fu clapped his hands and Woh-fen, a gloomy figure in black alpaca, announced that Totuma had arrived.

"Shall I bring him in, Master?"

"It will be sufficient if you send him in. His Excellency has not come yet?"

Her eyes blazed; she had been rejected. . . . . Her open palm struck him full on the mouth.

"No, Master."

Woh-fen bowed deep, and though his face was as unreadable as that of the average of his race, I felt for some reason his eyes were fixed on MacGrath with something other than affection.

Totuma came and squatted cross-legged on the floor. At a nod from Yuan Pei-fu, MacGrath took charge of him.

"Totuma, there are one or two things about Atapu we should like to learn. Before L'lalla left last night, she spoke of a white man and his daughter. Are there such at Atapu?"

"Ya, Tuan, at the court of Oturi of Paramata, a white man old and of weak head, and a daughter of an unpleasant disposition. L'lalla does not love either, but Oturi protects them."

"How did these two come to Paramata?"

"It was in the year of the Great Storms, Tuan. I was but so high, and even more foolish than I have since been. Their vessel of three masts, storm-driven, by the favor of Allah and the craft of its own white devil, passed the reefs and stranded in the river mouth. It is clear that human hand and eye, even if the channel were known, could not bring a ship through. The watch found her at dawn, and that day and night, and all the next day, there was war. They were desperate men, but by the next sunrise there was peace, except for a man or two hunted like rats among the mangroves. The night following, the blaze of her timbers made night like today."

TOTUMA, who had sat at first listless with bowed shoulders and lifeless eyes, brightened at the very whisper of war. Like all his race, he was a born fighting man, and a born story-teller. His hand gestured savagely to illustrate those deaths in the fetid mud of the mangroves. Pausing, he flashed a smile of understanding at MacGrath as from one warrior to another.

The Captain nodded.

"There was fighting worthy of men and plunder worthy of the battle, Totuma. How came it that two remained alive?"

"It is told, Tuan, that Oturi, who in those days could move in the forest without the help of men to ease him between the tree-trunks, was with the party which found them. The white man knelt before a little baby, and a thing of stone cunningly shaped in the image of a fisherman of Celebes. When Oturi came on them, the white man laid the image beside the baby. He bowed to them with his belly to the ground, and then turned his bare breast for Oturi's kris."

Yuan Pei-fu could certainly not sacrifice dignity to the extent of whistling, but a long hissing sigh escaped his pursed lips and floated mysteriously in the upper air till the punkah swept it through a ventilator. Leaving his chin unsupported for a moment, he stretched his arms on the wide desk and beat a gentle tattoo with his long pointed nails. At Totuma's startled glance, he slipped his hands back under his chin again and stared before him with eyes which had sunk to tiny specks of fire.

"Oturi did not strike," MacGrath murmured. "When so many had been slain, why save these?"

"It is said by some that Oturi was weary." Totuma's lips curled scornfully. "I have never known Oturi weary of slaying when the sport was safe for the slayer. He says himself that he had use for the white man's wisdom. When he forbore the blow, he did not know whether the white man were deaf or dumb, sane or mad, as his actions made him appear."

"And the real reason, Son of Wisdom?"

Totuma's white teeth flashed a smile.

"Tuan, Oturi's father's father was a bushman of Itiki. His people kept pigs. They leave food at the base of hollow trees, wear this to ward fever and that to ward wild beasts. They sleep in trees like apes, and cry like women at the sight of a naked blade. He was afraid of the image, Tuan—and is still afraid."

MacGrath gazed levelly at Totuma.

"An old wife. There are then no men in Paramata?"

Totuma sprang to his feet, hand on the carved hilt of his kris, eyes ablaze.

"My father's father was a chief of men in the days when Atapu was one kingdom and we roved the sea in our war-boats taking what we wanted in women, in merchandise, in gold! My father died at the hand of Oturi."

The Scot leaned back in his chair, hands clasped behind his head, a mocking smile on his lips.

"Oturi lives—and you live, son of princes?"

Totuma half drew his weapon; then remembering his manners, he covered the hilt quickly with the fold of his sarong and bowed his apologies.

"In the house of friends, pardon. But Tuan, you have the eye and the tongue of a devil! Oturi lives, and I live. Tuan, I loved a woman." His head dropped forward. "I no longer love a woman."

"Or better still," Yuan Pei-fu commented in English which Totuma could not understand, "he loves hopelessly on the border of hate. The only medicine is battle, and he cares not if he lives or dies."

THE heat of the day was beginning to make itself felt even in the twilight of Yuan's room. Totuma sank back to the floor with his arms clasped over his knees and his head bowed on his locked hands. MacGrath, tilted back in his chair, began to fill a pipe lazily. Under the influence of the gently whispering punkah, my eyelids fluttered down.

"Incredible, but possibly true," Yuan Pei-fu's voice murmured crooningly from a vast distance. "On these seas only the incredible is true."

My feet came down with a clatter on the waste-paper basket as I sat up, staring about me. I had slept, and they smiled at my discomfiture.

"And if true?" MacGrath asked in a bored voice in flat contradiction of the joyful glitter of his blue eye.

"If true, Captain, there is work such as your soul loves."

I groaned. I was under no obligation to involve myself further in the affairs of Yuan Pei-fu or MacGrath and I longed for my cool, peaceful bungalow high on Turamati's cliffs. I haven't the soul of a brigand, a soldier, or even of a mere political cut-purse. I like days long and friendly with an iced drink in a tall glass, and evenings sitting on the wide veranda, the sea murmuring the myriad tropic whispers. But somehow I felt bound to see through to an end whatever developed out of the hazards of the last few days.

MacGrath, hearing my groan, grinned.

"It is possible," Yuan murmured equably, but with a brighter gleam than normal slipping between the chinks of his shuttered eyes. "Ku-sing is far up the Yangtse, and its temple used to house the god Hai-tao-hai. The god's principal business in the celestial hierarchy was to insure the birth of male children to the faithful servants of heaven's will. As to the god's success in the pursuit of his celestial labor, my memory fails me, but his single eye was valued at twenty thousand yen; and with his crown and rings and other ornaments, the total cash value of a very small image was two hundred thousand yen.

"Hai-tao-hai was stolen by an Englishman. He must have been an exceptional

man with exceptional knowledge of our country, for he passed as a pilgrim and was constantly about the temple for some weeks before the theft.

"The Englishman was pursued to Wuhan, where he was taken and executed, but the god was not found. He had accomplices. They were traced also, but the trail was lost at Kowloon. A year later, a dying man, a maker of holy images, confessed to a doctor in Busuanga that he had for a considerable sum disguised the god in the plaster cast of a Celebes fisher-boy.

"The doctor was a deeply religious man; he denounced his patient to the priests of the local monastery with the result that the wretched image-maker died a few days sooner, and a few degrees more painfully, than nature had, in any event, arranged for him. The priests did not recover the god, but they were able to trace the thieves to the schooner *Gentle Mary*. Inquiry stopped there, for it was ascertained that the ship was lost at sea in the hurricanes which that year cluttered all these coasts with wrecks. I wonder."

"It can be proved either way," MacGrath said.

"It would be well," Yuan Pei-fu murmured. "Since the loss of the god, the birth of girl children among the followers of Hai-tao-hai has been constantly increasing, with the result that infanticide is increasing too."

"There is also the value of the eye of the god with diadem and rings to the value of two hundred thousand yen," Mac supplemented with perfect gravity.

"Exactly, Captain."

Woh-fen came in quickly on the heels of his warning knock.

"Master, His Excellency the Governor."

"Show His Excellency in."

My hair leaped on my scalp at the name, but the visitor was a very different man from our victim of the previous night.

He was in spotless white, a small, thin, yellow ghost of a man, without blood enough to generate perspiration. He carried a huge helmet under his arm. His forehead looked monumental over a small-featured but forceful face. His gleaming black eyes ran craftily from one to another. His thin, hooked nose, wrinkled comically below the bridge, suggested the perpetual beginning of a sneeze. His thin-lipped mouth, lifted at one corner by an old scar, seemed to wear a perpetual sneer.

Following Yuan's example, we rose to our feet to bow our respects to the new shadow of power in the isles of the Sultry Straits. I knew De Reya, I suppose, as well as anybody in the islands could claim to know him, which is to say that I had bowed to him at an occasional garden party, had passed a remark on the weather when we chanced to touch elbows in the smoke-room of the Gabriel Rossetti. I had wondered about him, and had got rather to like him, as one might get to like a bizarre ornament at the club or in the park. We all had known that De Reya was the man who did the work of government, and I was glad to congratulate him if now he was to come in for a few of the pickings.

Yuan Pei-fu was a never-failing joy. The gentle respect of his bearing toward the Governor who had that morning been appointed by himself would leave nothing to be desired.

"I think there is no need for me to introduce my friends, Excellency. They are known to you."

De Reya bowed. "The pen and the—er—knuckle-duster," he said.

"I thank Your Excellency. You might have said the brain and the brawn, which would have been true but wounding. May we offer congratulations?"

De Reya inclined his head. "My thanks. If Mr. Matheson is by chance sending one of his discreet messages to England, a reference to the change of government in these islands would be welcome."

He sat down in the chair Woh-fen had drawn up for him, and coffee was brought.

"HERE we are all friends," Yuan said when we were settled with our cups. "Your Excellency may speak as freely as if we were alone."

"So far all is well," De Reya said; and you could never have guessed from his tone that he was reporting to his master. "There was very little damage done last night. I have taken over the Residency. The staff and guards are more than satisfied. The out-magistrates will either be satisfied or go. We have of course to receive confirmation from home. It is a matter of form only, since those who have to be paid will be paid."

His thin lips crooked contemptuously.

"One has no right to condemn a system of which one is taking advantage—but I would have you gentlemen believe that I am as honest as my country will permit me to be."

Yuan Pei-fu shrugged his shoulders.

"We are all as honest as circumstances permit, Excellency; the very best are dishonest at one level or the other. No man is better than his neighbor, though this one by silence and that one by noise may escape detection. Is there any news of your lamented predecessor?"

"I have reason to suppose he has gone to Atapu. He has his launch, a considerable fortune in actual cash, and God knows what stored away in Atapu itself."

"And there?"

"He may live, or die, or become a—a damn' nuisance. The two kingdoms are already by the ears in Atapu, and you know how much power we have there."

"But in Suhiti and the remainder of the settled isles his power is broken?"

"As if it had never been."

"And if I—with the assistance of Captain MacGrath—should reduce the two kingdoms of Atapu to obedience and tribute, you and we might look for a suitable reward?"

De Reya rose with a flash of white teeth.

"I should probably be called home to govern a country which has ceased to know how to conquer, in which case half the island should be yours. But I beg you will act circumspectly till the business is concluded. There are other powers with queer notions of native rights; and at home—"

His shoulders shot above his ears.

"Privately, to the full limits of my ability, I am at your disposal; officially I am blind as a bat."

He bowed himself out. MacGrath, at a nod from Yuan, lit his pipe. The punkah swept back and forth; Yuan Pei-fu, with his ivory head resting upon his clasped hands, sat thinking—thinking.

WHEN MacGrath and I parted on the government wharf that evening, we were in possession of the results of Yuan Pei-fu's meditation:

The *Emma* was to go another trip into the north, but on this occasion she was definitely a privateer with letters of marque under the prehensile yellow hand of Yuan Pei-fu. MacGrath's instructions left it within his discretion to rescue a captive maiden, to subjugate two kingdoms, or to do for the whole brown population of Atapu what it might seem to him would be good for them and for the business of the owner. The one definite order, with no margin of discretion, was that the Celebes fisher-boy was to be brought out of heretic hands to the fond hands of our own religious antiquarian.

MacGrath turned impish eyes on me.

"Coming?"

I compressed into a very few seconds a picture of my white bungalow and the days of slippered ease which were in danger of vanishing under the infantile smile of this ruthless castaway. I didn't want to go—not one little bit; but I went as so many volunteers go on warlike enterprises, because I was afraid to appear afraid.

THERE would be about ten days delay before the *Emma* could be ready. I was going to spend that at Turamati, eating, drinking, sleeping, dreaming. Perhaps I should engage in a little—a very little—journalism for the sake of my self-respect.

MacGrath stood beside me while the old paddle ferry coughed and thrashed its way into position at the wharf.

"Look here, don't come if you don't feel like it," he said suddenly. "One's always apt to get scuppered in this kind of show, and there's no reason in the world why a respectable citizen should go and get killed for nothing."

"And you?" I asked.

"I? Oh, I'm only one remove from a beachcomber. If I mayn't fight, my only resource is to get drunk or into some other mischief."

"Well, I'm coming—but why not you come over to Turamati for a few days? Tuala can look after the cargo, can't he?"

"Yes, but I've an idea this may be a different proposition from the thing it looks to be. I want to see the *Emma* as much like a battleship as possible. I want to inaugurate a little secret service of my own, too. Ask me later on, and I'll buy a suit of clothes fit for the occasion."

I watched him across the widening gulf of white churning water as the ferry-boat backed away. He stood, long and lean, with that queer attitude of twining himself round an invisible pillar. He waved suddenly, and turning, moved across the jetty with long, free strides. I had had many friends and many acquaintances in a life which had been made too comfortable for me. Friends and acquaintances come and go—but MacGrath I was beginning to love.

The quest for the stolen idol leads our adventurers through even more picturesquely exciting events—in the next installment, in our forthcoming July issue.

"Listen, Olaf," Grogan said; "we don't stand for no Be-Jones and Be-Johnsons, see? From now on your name is Casey."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

He Laughed at Last

He was a wild man from Iceland and he easily learned to play baseball. But to take a joke—that was a harder and funnier lesson.

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

NOW, here in Middletown, when we play ball, we play it. Only last summer I had a chance to see New York play Boston, and when I got home, Grogan said: "Well, Finnerty, how was it?" I gave him a laugh. "Ping-pong," I said.

In this Middletown Industrial League, we play ball. We've got the Interstate Car Foundry, and the Northern Box & Barrel, and the Midland Granite Slab, and such; and when a man wants to play ball in this Industrial League, he's got to be so tough you can run him through a stone-crusher, and nothing happens except maybe the stone-crusher goes out of business. When a game goes five innings without being broke up by a fight or a riot, it's a game—and the score stands.

A first base who couldn't knock out a soft snap like that Tunney guy wouldn't last out three innings in this league. He wouldn't last at all. The first runner that come to his base would show him his foot was off the bag or be carried home on a stretcher. The way it runs is like this—first man to bat, first fight; second man to bat, second fight. A fella that can't stand up and be clouted over the head four-five times with a ball-bat, and then step right up and knock out a safe hit, don't belong. He's out of this man's league before he is in. You got to be a tough baby when the grandstand comes down in one gang to massacre you.

THE only human kind that don't get beat up in this man's league is the ump. We don't hurt umps. That's out. We don't talk back to umps. Umps is immune, what I mean. The time us Foundries played the Granite Slabs and had a discussion with Zelinsky, who umped the seventh game in the 1919 series, and this twirler Schmitz of ours got life in the pen because Zelinsky never did come to after Schmitz socked him with the bat, there was three years the Industrial League didn't have any games, because nobody would ump for us. And that's no good. So we've got a rule now that nobody socks an ump or talks back to him or fusses with him at all—player or audience. If a guy don't like an ump's decision, he can slug somebody else, but he can't even say, "Pardon, Mister, did I hear you right?" to the ump.

That's how it ought to be, too, because these umps get too much of a dirty deal if

it aint that way. In our league if a twirler makes a miscue and throws the ball over the grandstand behind the backstop, and so off to one side it goes over the ticket-box, and the ump says, "Strike!" it is a strike. And if a ball goes clean over the plate and the ump says "Ball Two!" it is Ball Two. Nobody says a word to him.

Maybe the catcher will walk up to the batter and say: "Say, you big bum, that was a ball; the ump says so." Then the batter may say: "I know it was a ball, you slimy snake; I heard the ump say it." And then the catcher will say, maybe, "And don't you call me a slimy snake, you wart-toad," and sock the batter in the jaw, and there'll be a good ruckus, with the fielders running in and the guys piling down out of the stand and off the bleachers.

But nobody touches the ump. He stands back out of the way until the battle is over and the ambulances have took the wounded away, and then he takes his last puff at his cigarette and throws it away, and pulls on his mask and steps behind the plate and says: "Batter *up!*" and we go ahead with the game. Umps is immune, always.

WELL, what I'm telling you, this left-field Ritzhein of ours went to sock Macluso of the Box & Barrels on the jaw just when Grogan went to bunt Macluso with a bat, and Ritzy's fist hit the bat, and it broke three of his fingers and done things to his thumb so he aint able to play ball again that season. That's bad, because we've already got eight men in hospital because of that game we had the week before with the Slabs. So I says to Grogan: "How about that big Hunk or whatever he is that just took the job in Shop Four? Maybe he can play ball." So Grogan braced him about it.

Well, this blond was a fellow by the name of Bjorgenson or some such nonsense, and he looked like he could pick up a car-wheel and throw it a mile.

"Look here, you big Swede," Grogan says to him. "How about it—can you play ball?"

This new fellow looks at Grogan.

"Mister," he said, "you make a mistake. I am not Swede—I am an Icelander, from Reykjavik, in Iceland."

"Is that so!" said Grogan. "How was I to know? All you Hunks and Danes and Swedes and things look alike to an Irishman, and don't you get so fresh, either. If I call you a Swede, you are a Swede, see?"

"I am an Icelander, from Reykjavik, in Iceland," the big fella said again. "I am not Swede."

"All right; have it your own way," Grogan said. "I don't care what you are. What I want to know, Swede, is can you play ball?"

AFTER four or five minutes, five or six of us got this Olaf off of Grogan, and in a couple of minutes Grogan was able to stand up by leaning against the fence, and we got Olaf quieted down.

"What did you do that for?" I asked him. "That's no way to treat a ball captain when he asks you a simple question."

"He called me Swede," this big boy said. "I am not Swede; I am Icelander, from Reykjavik, in Iceland—"

"Say, listen!" I told him. "Don't you know how to take a joke once in a while? Don't you know what a joke is when you see one? He was joking you, that's all. And you go and slug him!"

So this Olaf thought this over awhile.

"Oh, a joke!" he said. "I don't know it is a joke. How do I know if he don't tell me? He calls me Swede, and I am an Icelander, from Reyk—"

"Lay off it!" I said. "I heard it before, the first time. Go on—shake hands with Grogan now; and after this, remember that when he calls an Icelander a Swede, it is a joke of his, and you ought to laugh. Remember that!"

So he went and shook hands with Grogan.

"You're good," Grogan told him—because in this league of ours you don't only have to play ball but you have to know the manly art of self-defense and two or three acts of slugging the other murderer before he slugs you. So, "You're good," Grogan says to Olaf. "But can you play ball?"

"What kind of ball you mean?" Olaf asked him.

"Baseball."

"I don't pitch so good," Olaf said, and he never cracked a smile. He's serious-minded, that boy. "Otherwise, yes; I am good. I am an Icelander, from Reykjavik in Iceland; and in Reykjavik in Iceland I did not play baseball or maybe I am a good pitcher too. But batter, runner, catcher, baseman, short-stop, fielder—yes, I am good."

"I bet you are!" Grogan sneered. "And a whale of a bat-boy, too, or am I wrong? Can you cover left field without making a fool of yourself, Swede?"

Well, I expected Olaf would light into Grogan again, but he didn't. He knew "Swede" was a joke, and he took it as such, because I'd told him.

"When I play left field, nobody is a fool but such a fellow what knocks a fly further as third base," Olaf said. "He is a fool when I play left field. He is out right away."

"And I suppose if there is a man running home, you throw him out and make it two out, don't you?" Grogan sneered.

"Not every time," Olaf said. "Sometimes the catcher don't stay on home plate and wait for the ball."

"Well, listen, you!" Grogan said. "I'm going to give you a try, anyhow, in left field. You're on the nine now, see? What pay you getting?"

"Twenty-five dollars a week," Olaf said.

"I'll speak to the Supe, and from now on you get fifty, see? How do you spell your name?"

Grogan got out a pencil and a card.

"*B*" said Olaf.

"Yeah!"

"*J*" Olaf said, and Grogan gave him a funny look.

"*O*" Olaf said, and Grogan spat to one side and gave him a dirty look.

"Cut out the funny business, fella," he said. "None of this *B-j-o* stuff. How do you spell your name? What is your name, anyway?"

"Beergenson," or something like that, Olaf said.

"Yeah? Well, there aint no '*j*' in it, see?" Grogan said. "The way you spell *Beer* is '*b-e-e-r.*' 'B-j-o' spells '*Bee-joe*' in this man's country."

"In Iceland, where I am an Icelander from Reykjavik," Olaf said patiently, "the '*j*' is in words to show how they are spoke. When a '*B*' and a '*j*' and an '*o*' are like in my name, it is to show that you speak the '*o*' like '*u*' in '*bugle.*' So in my name: '*Bjor,*' like '*Beer.*' If you please, Mister."

"Well, listen, Olaf," Grogan said; "in Ireland, where my old man came from, we don't take beer in bugles, see? And we don't stand for no Be-Jones and Be-Johnsons, see? From now on your name is Casey, see? George," he said to our scorer, "put this big Swede on your list as Casey —Olaf Casey, see?"

Naturally, I thought Olaf would sock him one, and I got ready to do what I could to save Grogan from untimely death, but Olaf only looked at me.

"Is it a joke?" he asked me.

"Sure it is a joke, Olaf," I told him. "Grogan is always cracking funny jokes like that. You'll get used to him. One of these days you'll be laughing your head off at Grogan's jokes, like the rest of us."

"A little more like that out of you," Grogan said to me, "and I'll hand you a couple that your own mother wouldn't know was you yourself or what's left of the beefsteak."

BUT it fixed it all right with Olaf, and that was how come we had a big Swede on the Foundry nine that was an Icelander named Casey. And let me tell you he was good! Boy, he was good! When big Swede Casey came streaking in from left field, looking for a bat or some other destructive weapon, the toughest grandstand crowd took one look and faded back to their seats. And when the Icelander raised his eyes to a fly ball, it was as good as already in his mitt and on its way to infield. The only trouble was that the fella had no more sense of humor than a stone horse.

We had an ump that season named Bimmer, a little runt of a man as bald as an egg, but one of these cheerful little guys. He umped back of the plate, and his mate was an ump named Colton, covering infield. This man Colton was serious enough, but Bimmer liked to be always cracking jokes. So in this game, in the fifth inning, Olaf connected with a fast straight and knocked it about a mile. No men on bases, and Bimmer took off his mask and stood back while Olaf ran around the diamond for a home run.

"Pretty fair, Casey," little Bimmer said to the big fellow as Bimmer stepped forward to ump again. "The only trouble with you is you ought to learn to play ball. You ought to have saved that till there were three men on bases."

Like in these stories, see? It was a joke Bimmer was pulling, and Bimmer didn't think nothing of it; he was so full of these —now—merry quips, that he spilled them by the dozen like he was saying, "Have one on me, I got a cellar full at home." Some wasn't so good, but a cut-up can't always be ace-high, and you take them as they come, and if you can't laugh, you grin. But Olaf looked at this ump a second.

"I ought to learn to play ball, yes?" he said, and he picked Bimmer up and threw him up into the wire of the backstop.

SO when Bimmer landed down and got up and brushed his pants off, he said: "Three weeks on the bench for you, Casey."

And he could have thrown Casey off the nine, at that, and nobody would have said a peep when it's fixed so that if you so much as brush against an ump going to bat, you say: "Beg pardon, Ump."

"Is that the funny part," said Olaf, "—such a lot of crows in one tree?"

Well, you know how josh is always going on in a ball-team, and if it wasn't one fight, it was another with Olaf. It was a bum week when Olaf didn't have one or two of our men in hospital because he didn't know a joke when he heard one; and us and the Slabs was so close together in the averages that having a man laid up wasn't so good.

"The trouble with this big Swede," I said to Hermie Gratz one Saturday when we were in the dugout waiting our turn, "is he is too serious entirely. He's like one of these long-jawed preachers or something that don't know a joke from a funeral."

"Well, what are you going to expect," Hermie said, "when a man is born and raised in Iceland, where they got ice and nothing but ice? You wouldn't see much fun in things if you'd lived most of your life with a lot of Eskimos, and the thermometer a hundred below zero and you had a job herding polar bears on icebergs."

"Yeah?" I said. "What's that got to do with it? There's been plenty of Irish lived all their lives in the bogs and gone hungry if their one pig died on them, and could laugh as good as I can. Where you live don't count; it's have you got your sense of humor developed, or haven't you."

"Yeah? Well, this Casey from Iceland hasn't got any sense of humor to develop."

"Sure, he has!" I said. "Everybody has got a sense of humor, only you got to develop it. How about it, Grogan?"

"You ought to know; you're telling it," Grogan said, "but I wish to this and that you'd develop a sense of something in that big blond before he ruins this nine entirely."

"Well, that can be done, too," I said.

SO Grogan went to bat, and Olaf came to the bench, having stolen home on the Box & Barrel twirler's wild throw to third.

"That was good business, Olaf," I told him. "I bet the soles of your shoes is afire, you come in so fast."

He turned up one foot and then the other and looked at them.

"No," he said. "That don't happen. A man has to run faster than I can run to make such heat."

He went over to get a drink and got to talking to Zimmy.

"Listen, Hermie," I said to Gratz: "You and me can develop a sense of humor in this Icelander if we want to. All it takes is brains and to go at it the right way, and we'll have him laughing his head off like anybody else."

"How, for instance?" Hermie asked me.

"Well, we got to show him a joke is a joke," I said. "The way it is now, he

don't know where to look for the joke in a joke. Once he gets the hang of it, he will be all right. What's a good joke to start in with, huh?"

"There's that parrot joke," Hermie said; "that one about the crows and the parrot. That's a good funny joke."

"I guess I don't know that one," I said. "What is it about?"

"Here comes Olaf," Hermie said. "Wait and I'll tell it to him."

So Olaf came wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He sat down between me and Hermie, and Hermie started to laugh.

"What are you laughing at, Dutch?" Olaf asked him. "If you are laughing at me, I will ka-nock your block off."

"Say, you aint so funny I should laugh at you," Hermie said. "I am laughing at a funny joke—you know, Irish, the one about the parrot and the crows."

"Sure!" I said. "That's a funny joke, all right. Go ahead and tell it to Olaf. He'll laugh his head off."

"IT seems," Hermie began, "there was this guy that sold tickets for a circus, and when he opened the ticket-wagon, all the yokels jammed up in front of the window and wanted tickets at once. Pushing and shoving and yelling 'One, Mister!' and 'Two here, Mister!' and all like that. So this guy had a parrot—"

"What guy?" Olaf asked.

"This ticket-seller. He had one of them talkative parrots—"

"Parrots can talk?" Olaf asked.

"Sure they can talk,"

"You mean langwidtch—parrots talk langwidtch?" Olaf asked.

"Yeh. English and American and all like that. Like folks. Like you and me, Olaf. Just the same."

"Icelandic?"

"Sure, if the guy that owns it is an Icelander and talks Iceland talk to it. So this guy—"

"What guy?"

"This ticket-seller I'm telling you about. He had a parrot in the—"

"A talking parrot?"

"Yes. This ticket-seller guy had a talking parrot that he always kept on a perch behind him in the ticket-wagon and—"

"What langwidtch did the parrot talk, Hermie?" Olaf asked. "I guess I like pretty good to have me one of those talking parrots if it talks Icelandic. Almost I forget how to talk Icelandic in this country. How much costs a parrot that talks Icelandic?"

"Say, how do I know? You got to go to a bird-store to find that out. I aint no parrot-seller, am I?" Hermie said, and then he had to go to bat. So when he struck out, he come back.

"Five dollars?" Olaf asked.

"Five dollars what?" Hermie asked him.

"Could I buy a talking parrot for five dollars?" Olaf asked.

"Aw, cut it out, Olaf!" I said. "You go downtown tonight and find a bird-store. Go on, Hermie, and tell him the funny joke."

"Well, this ticket-seller guy had this parrot," Hermie said, "and all the time the window was open, this parrot didn't have nothing to do but watch the gang pushing in and grabbing tickets. So it didn't say nothing. It just sat on its perch and listened. So one day when the show was playing one of these tank towns—"

"Rizzo aint got no control today," Olaf said. "That ball went two miles wide, I bet you!"

"Say, you! Look here! I'm telling you a funny joke," Hermie said, getting hot. "Do you want I should, or don't you?"

"Sure I want you to," Olaf said. "I only say Rizzo aint got no—"

"Well, if you want me to tell this funny joke, you listen, you big Swede!" Hermie said. "You forget Rizzo for a while. Where was I?"

"The show was playing one of these tank-towns," I reminded him.

"Yes. So the show was playing one of these tank-towns one day, and—well, I forgot to tell you what this ticket-seller guy said. He was always saying, when the crowd jammed up to the window—he was always saying: 'Take your time, gentlemen! Don't crowd! There's plenty for all! You'll each get one!' Like that, see? Only the parrot don't say anything; he just sits and listens."

"Wise, like," I explained.

"Yeh—wise, like," Hermie said. "So when the show is playing this tank-town, the parrot sees some trees over on the edge of the lot, and it slips out of the window and flies over to see is they banana trees or something, maybe. So pretty soon the ticket-seller guy he hears one whale of a racket over there in the trees. Crows cawing. One whale of a lot of crows cawing. So this ticket-seller guy thinks: 'That's funny! What's the matter with

them crows?' And when he shuts up the ticket window, he goes over to see."

HERMIE stopped to take a chew of tobacco, and Olaf nodded his head.

"Yes, that's funny," he said without cracking a smile. "I remember when I was a boy in Reykjavik in Iceland—"

"I aint through yet, you!" Hermie said. "I aint come to the funny part yet. Shut up till I get through. Where was I?"

"The ticket guy went over to see what the crows in the tree was doing all the cawing about," I reminded him.

"Yeh! Well, there was the parrot up in the tree hanging onto a branch, and about forty crows all excited and mad, darting in at him and cawing, and every time a crow darted in, it grabbed a feather out of the parrot. He didn't have but about six feathers left on him, but there he set all humped up and blinking, saying: 'Take your time, gentlemen! Don't crowd! There's plenty for all! You'll each get one!'"

Hermie stopped and waited for Olaf to laugh. But Olaf didn't laugh. He waited a second or two.

"Yes," he said. "Go on. I am listening."

"Go on! That's all of it," Hermie said. "Don't you think it is funny?"

"Maybe I was thinking too much about Rizzo," Olaf said. "Tell me again; I listen good this time."

So Hermie told it again, straight on from the start, and Olaf listened. Then he thought it over.

"How many crows you said it was?" he asked after a while.

"Oh, forty! Maybe thirty, maybe fifty," Hermie said.

"That's a lot of crows," Olaf said. "Is that the funny part—such a lot of crows in one tree?"

"For cat's sake!" Hermie said, sort of sore. "Listen—I'll tell it to you again, Olaf. There was a ticket-seller guy in a circus—"

When he got to the end, Olaf frowned and scratched his ear.

"Is it funny when that parrot thought it was a banana tree and it was a tree that don't have such bananas on it, but only crows?" Olaf asked.

"Of all the solid ivory!" Hermie said, and he got up and went to the far end of the bench and sat down and swore.

So after the game I went and chewed it over with Hermie and calmed him down.

"You got to be easy with the big boy," I said to Hermie. "He just aint used to seeing what is funny in these funny jokes. It's new to him. You got him wrong, Hermie; he aint no ivory-head. You give that guy a chance and get him to know how to see jokes, and he'll be laughing his head off. He's the kind of big guy that will laugh plenty when he starts laughing."

"Yeh? And when does he start?" Hermie wanted to know.

"When we get this here, now, sense of humor of his working," I told Hermie. "You got to admit that parrot joke has got a lot of parts to it, Hermie. It aint no easy joke—like, maybe, giving Barhans a push in the pants when he's drinking out of the water-bucket. A guy that aint used to laughing at funny jokes has got to get used to them. Why, cripes," I said, "I've heard jokes I didn't laugh at myself until I heard them, maybe, the second or third time. I remember one funny joke I read in a paper, and I read it over three-four times and didn't see no laugh in it—not until a fella showed me where it was. Give the big boy a chance, Hermie."

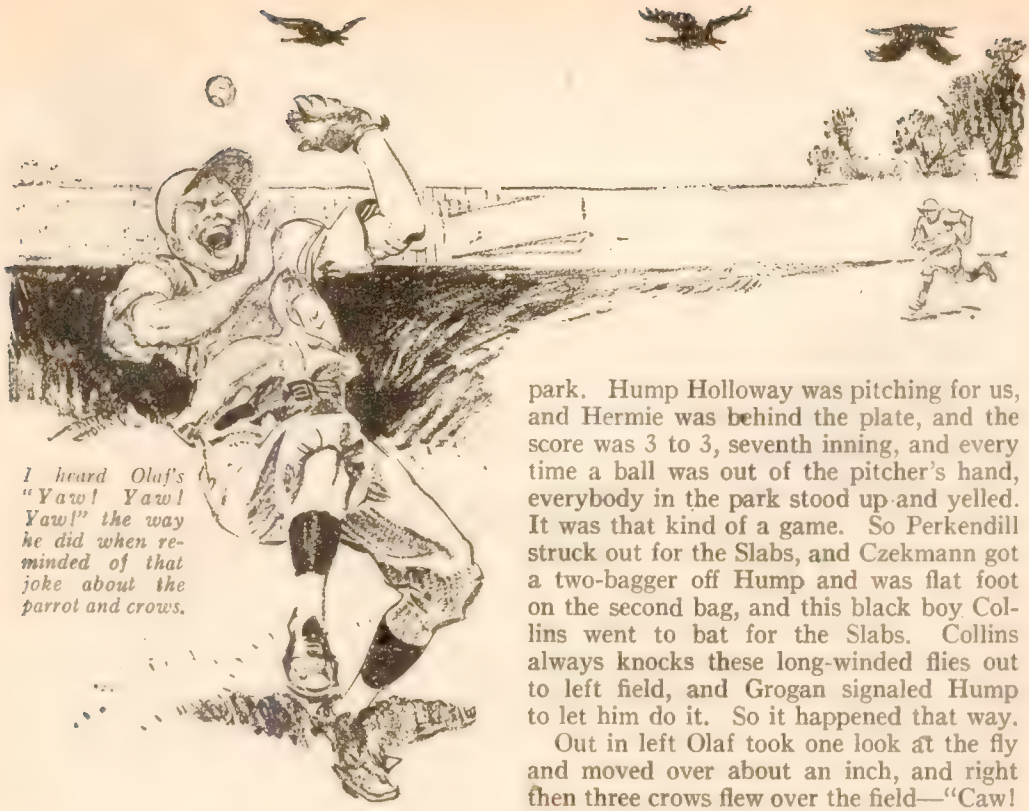
"Well, maybe you and me are sort of experts at this funny-joke business," Hermie admitted. "Icelanders are, maybe, more serious and slow that way."

WELL, we let that parrot joke go for a while and started to educate this sense of humor of Olaf's with easier jokes, like Hermie sliding a bat under me when I went to sit down, or me bumping up the dipper when Hermie went to take a drink. We got some good grins out of Olaf that way, and along toward the end of the season we got him so he was laughing pretty good at funny jokes like, "There was two Irishmen named Pat and Mike—" when the funny part wasn't too hard for Olaf to get.

Through that winter we kept right after the big Icelander, and in April when we begun outdoor practice Grogan complimented us.

"You're doing good, fellas," he said to us. "You'll make a human being out of that big Swede Casey from Iceland yet. Keep at it."

So by the time the year's series in the Industrial League started up, we had Olaf's sense of humor working fine. Most any time you could hear his big "Yaw! Yaw! Yaw!" and we'd got him so that he even turned to the funny strips in the evening papers before he turned to the sporting



I heard Olaf's "Yaw! Yaw! Yaw!" the way he did when reminded of that joke about the parrot and crows.

page. A lot of times he would come up to Hermie and me and say: "Dutch, tell me that funny one about the parrot and the crows; I bet you I see where the joke is in it yet!"

And he did! All of a sudden, one day when we was in the dugout and Hermie was telling him the story again, Olaf let out a whoop and brought both his fists down on Hermie's shoulders so hard that he almost flattened him out. And I had to go get the water-bucket and souse the contents on Olaf or he might have died. He was flat on the floor and red in the face and gasping: "Take your time, gentlemen! Don't crowd! Yaw, yaw, yaw! There's plenty—oh! oh! oh!—plenty for all!"

He got that funny joke good when he did get it. He had a good sense of humor when you got it working. Grogan said to us: "You done it, fellas! He's human now." We felt fine about it. No more fights from Olaf. Umps could say anything they wanted to say to him, and he laughed at it. It made another man of him.

SO it came along to this Sunday afternoon we was playing the Granite Slabs, along late in the season, and our last game with them and the both of us standing .766 and .766, and all of eight thousand fans in the park. Hump Holloway was pitching for us, and Hermie was behind the plate, and the score was 3 to 3, seventh inning, and every time a ball was out of the pitcher's hand, everybody in the park stood up and yelled. It was that kind of a game. So Perkendill struck out for the Slabs, and Czekmann got a two-bagger off Hump and was flat foot on the second bag, and this black boy Collins went to bat for the Slabs. Collins always knocks these long-winded flies out to left field, and Grogan signaled Hump to let him do it. So it happened that way.

Out in left Olaf took one look at the fly and moved over about an inch, and right then three crows flew over the field—"Caw! Caw! Caw!"—and made for that tree back of the right-field fence. Even where I was on first I heard Olaf's "Yaw! Yaw! Yaw!" and saw him begin to pound his chest the way he did whenever anything reminded him of that funny joke about the parrot and the crows. The ball hit Olaf clean and nice on the top of the head, and he fell down, and Czekmann and Collins loped home while Brenner, the second, was running to scrape up the ball.

"Hey, Grogan!" Brenner called when he come up to Olaf. "The big Swede's out!"

But Olaf come to just then. He began to chuckle. "Take your time, gentlemen!" he snickered. "Don't crowd! Oh, my! What a funny joke!"

"Yeh?" Grogan said to him. "I'll say it is! Off the field, you! Out of the park! You're through!"

He was good and mad. That game was gone, and the series was gone—and in the shed when we were peeling, he come up to me and Hermie.

"Listen, you, and get this right," he said, sticking out his jaw at us. "The next time you start one of these funny-joke kindergardens, look who you pick. Irish, yes! Dutch, yes! Hunks, yes! But these big Swede Icelanders named Be-Jones Casey from Reykjavik in Iceland—no! They got too dang' much sense of humor!"

"I will kill the first man of you two who moves," he said softly.

Border Men

The able author of "My Deputy" and "War Paint" here gives us a stirring story of the peace-time war in the air against smugglers.

By ROBERT WINCHESTER

Illustrated by W. O. Kling

"DON'T know, Johnny," said Captain Saunders, section chief, Special Intelligence Unit, shaking his head. "I'd rather break him in on something not quite so tight. He has never been on the border—and it's a different game down there—as you know."

John Anson Hatfield, one of Saunders' aces, grinned cheerfully. "That's right, Captain—mostly it's a case of shoot first and holler halt afterward; but I reckoned that it would be a right good chance to break Wes in. If he comes out of a fussin' down yonder, he can play anywhere."

Saunders smiled. "You darn' Hatfields!" He was from Kentucky himself, this grim, hard-faced Captain. "Anyone would think we were doing your young brother a favor in sending him down to kill or get killed. That's all it is down there, Johnny, when it comes to the finals in this game—just kill or get killed."

"Yes suh, that's it. I reckon Wes can step up and carry it to the end."

"Like all the Hatfields," grinned the Captain, who loved the slim, black-eyed man sitting across from his desk in Washington, as much as he loved anything in this world. "Well, Johnny, I'll send him down. I really ought to send you, you no-'count scoundrel! You tell him that in spite of hell and high water we want the bird that calls himself Angelo Rizetta—as much alive as possible. If Wes can't deliver him that way, we want to know where he has hidden the De Bracy jewels. No need to go into details about how England wants him and has asked us to get him, and so forth. It might make the kid think he was responsible for the fate of nations and cramp his style. Tell him that the gent's right name is Andrea Vaccaro, if you wish, and that at one time he operated in England."

"I will," Johnny answered, rising. "I sure am obliged to you, Captain. I'll write Bill Earp and have Wes make contact with him."

"And that," said Saunders, as he picked up some papers on his desk, "will no doubt

help some. I'd rather have Mr. William Earp of the Rangers with me on what you call a *fussin'* than a regiment of infantry, down in that man's country. Get going, young feller-me-lad!"

Johnny went back to the hotel where his younger brother was waiting for him. As Johnny came in, Wesley Hatfield rose from the couch where he had been sprawled out reading a magazine. He was slim, straight, boyish, not looking even his twenty years. With the bony nose, *à la* Duke of Wellington, high cheek-bones, firm tight lips and black eyes, about five feet seven inches tall, he looked exactly what he was, a Hatfield from Breathitt County, Kentucky.

Johnny looked at him sternly. "I got it for you," he said. "Now, don't you go gittin' uppity, feller. You been in the service just a year, and now you get you a case that Pete Harden or Dutch von Holzman or Bill Gunnell would give their eye-teeth to be on—and you get it all alone."

"Shucks, Johnny," answered Wes, his eyes shining, "I wont—no suh, I sure wont. Reckon there aint airy Hatfield gets uppity, thataway, and you knows it."

"Reckon I do." Johnny's smile told how much he thought of his brother, who was being given his chance to win his spurs. "Now—listen to me, and listen good and plenty." And he began his instructions.

The last thing he said was: "And before you go over and get that airplane, you frame things with Bill Earp. That's allowed, Wes. Every man works with a buddy if he can. We think you can bring this gent we are after into camp, and in the doing it you are entitled to have one buddy to help you."

"I will, Johnny. I'll get to him right away. Doggone, I'm glad I put those two years in on the flyin' field. I'd rather be a special agent than a flyer, though."

"Well suh," drawled Johnny, "I reckon you can sure find you plenty of ways to get killed in either of them."

THE touring-car that had just crossed the border west of Yuma stopped suddenly. One of the men in the rear seat opened his eyes and yawned, then asked sleepily: "What's the idea, Corky?"

"Nothing," answered the driver. "I was watchin' that plane. By thunder, that bird's in trouble! Look at him turn over!"

One of the other men laughed. "I wouldn't go up in one of those damn' things for nine million dollars. Look at him twisting like a top!"

The plane above them and a little to the right was certainly acting as if it was out of control or seriously damaged in some way. It slipped, went into a spiral, then straightened out, ran on an even keel for a moment, then went into a nose-dive.

"That lad is going to hit the ground in a minute," announced the driver, starting the car and pulling away from the trail.

"Where the hell are you going?" demanded one of the men. There were five of them in the car.

"I'm going to get as close to him as I can," answered the driver shortly. "That baby will need help damn' fast when he lights."

"Yeah? And since when have you been a little helping hand? We got some hot stuff here, feller."

"You'll collect some more—in your belly, in about a minute," snarled the driver, "and I'll put it there! I was at the front, you toaster, while you were savin' the country at some damn' munition-plant. I'll see no lad crash without giving him a hand. Laugh that off!"

BUT the plane came out of the nose-dive, started up, hung a moment, then came down. The men in the car were close enough to see the pilot making desperate efforts to pull it up. He did, a little—enough so that when it hit, the right wing touched the ground first, breaking the fall. It crumpled; the propeller smashed; the under-carriage gave way, but the fuselage remained practically intact.

As the car came up to within ten feet and the men in it jumped out, the pilot of the plane crawled out. He was young, slim, black-eyed; and the reckless smile on his lips seemed to be there naturally and as if it always was there.

He stood with his back to the plane and grinned. "How was that, umpire?" he demanded.

"Safe," answered Corky gravely. "Did you come down to get something?"

"Why, no," answered the young man politely, "I didn't—unless you happen to have a new connecting-rod and something I can use to clear a plugged oil-line." As he answered, he looked at the car and the five men. They were all dressed in "city" clothes, all young, but to the last man they had *gangster* written all over their faces.

One of them, as the young man spoke,

walked over, climbed up onto the plane and looked into the cockpit. He said: "Well, for cripes sake!" and got down, a smile on his face. The young man heard him and whirled around. He saw the man stepping down, and the smile vanished from his face. He took a step backward, which brought him up against the fuselage. His right hand went in under his flying overalls like the dip of a swallow and reappeared with a heavy revolver.

"That will be all," he said coldly. "On your way, gents. The show is over. Get in your car and step on it."

HIS draw was so fast and unexpected that none of the men had time to do more than look at him in surprise.

The young man radiated a deadly willingness to pull trigger, and they all sensed it. The little smile that had returned to his lips was a frozen one, the smile of a killer, and they all sensed that also.

"Hold 'er! Hold 'er!" protested Corky. "What the hell's the matter? Put that rod up, boy. We're right guys, all of us."

"Yeah?" The young man's eyes did not focus on Corky but kept the whole group in range of vision. "Jake with me. I'm a right guy myself, but I don't need any help—see?"

"Sure you don't," soothed Corky. "Only —are you so sure? It's a long way to any place—except where we're going."

"He's got a load of chandoo," said the man who had done the peeking.

"Have you?" demanded Corky. "Say, you've got in a jam, feller. How you going to get away with it? There's a hell of a lot of Rangers and Border Patrol around here. We just outrun a couple of cars, ourselves."

The young man laughed. "That's right," he said. "I got a load of chandoo—and I'm sure in a jam. I been in 'em before and got out. You birds better be highballin' it out of here before the Rangers and the Border Patrol come along and jam you too, for being with me. I'll bury it, and—"

"Say, listen," interrupted Corky. "We're going to a place where it will be jake for you to hide it, and maybe-so sell it—see? Why not load it with us and come with?"

"'Why not walk into my parlor,' said the spider to the fly?" jeered the young man. "Five of you and one of me! On your way, gents, before the old man gets nervous and his finger begins to twitch."

One of the men laughed. "You'd play hell," he sneered, "with us all here! Say when, Corky."

"Shut your flannel mouth, you psalm-singer," snarled Corky. "I'm running this. You'd get all you were looking for and then some if this lad cut loose. —Listen!" He turned to the flyer. "I told you we were right guys. We're going up the road a piece to meet our chief—see? You heard of Joe Werner? Well, it's him we're meetin'. Does that tell you anything?"

"Joe Werner? I've heard of him." The young man relaxed, and the smile became once more the reckless warm one, though the gun was held as before. "I used to be with Monckton and Carewe—does that tell you anything?"

"Yeah, boy! I should say it does. That was sure some mob. Well, how about it, are you coming?"

"Me and my shadow," answered the flyer cheerfully, putting his gun back into the holster under his left armpit. "I aint working with any outfit, myself. I buy on spec and sell 'er the same. Let's go."

"SKYBO just landed," said the Sniffling Kid, as he entered the room where Joe Werner and Bill Ganer were playing a desultory game of stud. It was in an old hacienda, twenty-odd miles below Yuma, in Mexico.

"We heard him," answered Werner. "Everything all right, kid?"

"All wrong," whined the Kid. "He told me that Mac and Rizetta got knocked off."

"Yeah?" asked Ganer, a cold-eyed young man. "Tell him to come in here."

"I will," sniffed the Kid. "Say, Joe, how about slippin' me some jack?"

"Nothing doing. You'd get too far away, you sleigh-rider. Go tell Gomez to give you enough chandoo for a couple of pipes."

"Aw, hell," whimpered the Sniffling Kid, "that damn' stuff aint got no kick in it for me no more. I want some— All right, I'm goin'!"—as Werner started to rise.

After the door closed behind him, Ganer reached for the cards and began shuffling them, his eyes tight. Finally he said: "Who do you think it might be?"

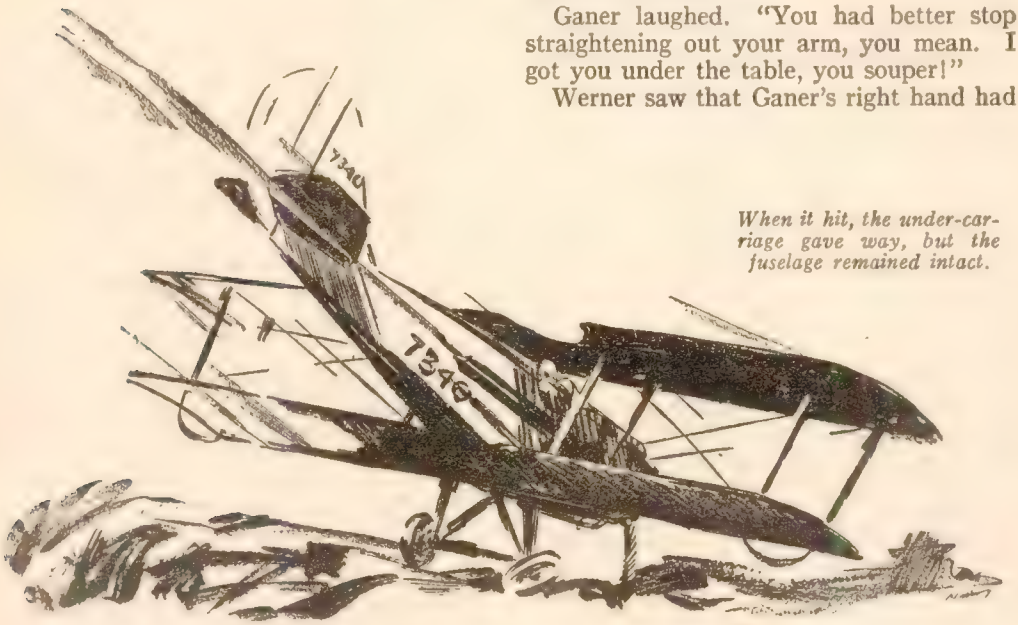
"If I knew," answered Werner, his upper lip curling, showing his white even teeth, his little eyes a lighter blue, "I'd take him out on the sand and cut the soles of his feet off and turn him loose."

"It may be that skirt of yours in San Bardoo."

"No, it isn't. You must have been trying to make her yourself, wanting to put her in a jam by—"

"You know damn' well I haven't," answered Ganer. "I don't tangle up women in my business."

"Meaning that I do? Well, listen, you:



When it hit, the under-carriage gave way, but the fuselage remained intact.

Now is as good a time as any to get you straightened out. You're a damn' good bull-buster, and I know you'll stick and slug; but you got one bad habit, see? And that is getting nosey. You'll be a whole lot healthier if you attend to your own end and lay off mine."

"That's right," said Ganer smoothly. "It is a good play for anyone to make, that attending-to-their-own-business thing. It just happens though that in doing that little thing, I've got to spread out some. Number Two is so close to Number One that in looking out for Number One, you got to keep an eye on Number Two—get it?"

"Yeah, I get it. You always was a windjammer, Ganer. This is one time where you can't talk your way out. I—"

"What do you mean I can't talk my way out? Out of what? Who the hell do you think you are? Get tight with these damn' hand-painted shoestrings you got around here all you want to, but lay off me. I'm sorry I ever hooked up with you, Werner. You're playing the same game that got Tony Mareno and Easton and Stanley with all his gang, and that is mixing pleasure with business. They got a lot of good lads knocked off, with their fooling around molls. You're going the same route, feller, and—"

"Why," interrupted Werner suavely, "if you feel that way about it, we had better make a cut and—"

Ganer laughed. "You had better stop straightening out your arm, you mean. I got you under the table, you souper!"

Werner saw that Ganer's right hand had disappeared. It had happened when he was lighting a cigarette. He smiled and raised his own arm until it was bent at an angle. "Fair enough," he said calmly, "though it only postpones it. I'm getting damn' good and—"

"Yeah? I know what you are—if you can get the other lad when he isn't looking. Well, I'm looking, see—all the time! Let's get down to cases: We've been pulling together now for almost a year. The last three months things have been going to hell in a handcar. What it is I don't know, but I'll call it a day, I guess. You can keep all the stuff over here, and I'll take the yacht and—"

"No, you wont. You wont take anything. I've stood for a lot of your bushwah, and I'm fed up. If you're pulling out, start from where you stand—and be damn' glad you have the chance."

"I don't know how many gorillas you have planted around here," said Ganer softly, "but you're my meat, right now—unless I get my cut."

"Am I? Well, by God, I'll take a chance with—"

THE door opened, and a slim young man, dressed in flying overalls came in. "Who's doing the praying?" he asked with a boyish grin. "Doggone! Gats out and everything! Quit it, gents—this is no time for a display of hardware. Let your arm come straight, Joe. Bill, you bring that gat up from under the table. I'm a shootin' scoun-da-rel, and I'll kill the both of you deader than a wagon-tire if you don't act your age."

The tone was gay and joking, and both men, the tenseness suddenly lifted, laughed.

"Tell Bill to put his rod on the table," said Werner. "Then I'll park alongside."

"Do it, Bill—Joe will play fair. If he don't, I'll come on board him myself, good and plenty."

Ganer put his gun on the table; and as he did so, Werner loosened the automatic from the clip holding it up his sleeve.

"That damn' thing will hang on you some day," sneered Ganer as Werner laid the gun on the table. "I hope I'm there to see it."

"You wont be," answered Werner grimly. "You'll be knocked off and eating sand for breakfast long before that time comes."

"Call the feudin' off a few minutes," said the young man, who was called Skybo because he flew a plane. Both Werner and Ganer laughed. There was an intangible something about the gay young flyer, whom they knew was a dead shot and equipped with a chilled-steel nerve, that appealed to them both. He was much younger than most of their men, and always seemed happy. Life to him appeared a huge joke —to be laughed at and played with. The two hard-boiled gamblers, dope-runners and killers, used to hard-faced, vicious-hearted men, probably found a certain relief in Skybo.

"Did the Sniffling Kid tell you that Mac and Rizetta were relaxin' in the booby-hatch in Yuma?"

"Yes," said Werner. "That's all he did tell us, though. Did you get through, Skybo?"

The young man reached into the inside pocket of his overall and drew out a roll of yellow-backed bills, tossing it on the table. "Yeah, brother, I always get through. Twenty grand—count 'er, gents."

"And while you are doing it," said Ganer with a grin, "toss half of it over here."

"Try and get it," answered Werner. "You're done, feller."

"Am I? Well—"

"You'll both of you be done in a few hours," interrupted Skybo curtly. "Mac has squealed."

"What?" shouted Werner. "The dirty little rat! I'll put him—"

"Steady does it," interrupted Ganer. "Tell us just what you know, Skybo."

"I met Danton, the lad that stays out at the transfer. He's got a friend that is a deputy sheriff—you know, the one that passes the loads along. Well, he told Danton that he was at the pogie when they brought Mac and Rizetta in, and he stuck around."

"Who knocked them off?" asked Werner.

"The Federal dicks. Danton said this John Law tipped him that Mac was telling them all about it, and that Rizetta was hanging tough."

"All Mac knows could be put on the back of a postage stamp," sneered Werner. "I'm not worrying about that. Did they have a chance to dump the load?"

"No. The Government cops jumped them while they were turning in at Pedro's to transfer."

"What was Manny Allmayer and Connors doing all that time?" demanded Werner.

"Both dead in the barn," answered Skybo cheerfully. "Pedro had a gun pointing at his ribs when he waved the boys to come on."

"How do you know?" asked Ganer.

"Pedro told Mac before they took him in. Mac told the John Law—the John Law told Danton—and Danton told me," answered Skybo with a grin. "Did you think I was there, Bill?"

GANER laughed. "I thought you might have been flying over. Just how much does Mac know of this game all the way through. Werner?"

"He had charge of transportation below the line," answered Werner shortly, "and that's all. If he knows anything else, he gumshoed it."

"What he tells and what they can prove are two different things," sneered Ganer. "Well, if you say so, Joe, I'll stick along until we get it settled. I never ran yet, when the bulls showed."

"All right—jake with me. —Skybo, supposin' you drift over and see if you can pick up any dope on how far Mac opened up. Got money enough?"

"I could use a grand," answered Skybo with a grin. "Thanks!"—as Werner tossed it over, in one bill.

AS Skybo was starting his car, which the Sniffling Kid brought out of a barn used as a garage for him, he said gravely: "And how are you this bright lovely morning, Mr. Kid?"

The Kid's watery blue eyes lightened up, showing the admiration he felt for the gay young flyer, who swaggered as the Kid had once, before the snow got him, many years before. "Not so good," he whined.

"Yeah? How come you talking thataway—a good-looking bird like you? By gosh, all the girls are after you, I bet you."

"I am a good-looker," answered the Kid, brightening up. "I'm a darn' good-looker, no foolin'. Say, you ought to have seen the molls I had—when I had the jack."

"I'll bet you did. What's the matter at the minute, old kid?"

"Aw, hell, I—nothin'; I'm all right. I'm a—aw, you know how it is, Skybo. I got to get me a bang, that's all. My nerves are shot to hell. Bill tells me to go over Gomez and get me a couple of pills. That damn' spig says he aint got any on hand, and tells me to go over to Sing Lee. He knows that yellow buzzard wont give me no credit."

"That was a right dirty trick," said Skybo hotly. "He knows you got to have it."

"I know I have. I'm getting so damn' jumpy right now I'm pretty near crazy. I aint got but a thin dime, and I'm afraid to ask Werner or Bill for any jack."

"Doggone, it's lucky I met up with you. I got me a twenty in my pocket that was just waitin' to be spent. Here—go and get you some real stuff, old-timer."

"Thanks," said the Sniffling Kid, using his sleeve for a handkerchief. "You're white, Skybo. I aint always been a snowbird, no matter what they—"

"I know you haven't," answered Skybo, starting the car. "So long, Kid. Be good and keep away from the ladies. Be virtuous and live long."

Then the young man called Skybo drove steadily north, crossed the line at a secluded spot, drove a little west by north, and headed into the hills. A little later he turned into a box cañon and stopped by a clump of trees. A man eased out from behind one, where he had been lying on his stomach watching the car come up. The man did not rise, and Skybo got out and began examining a tire.

"Nothing right new, Bill," he said. "Werner and Ganer are tellin' each other what they are going to do some day—same as ever. Rizetta is in the hoosegow at Yuma."

"Yeah?" And Bill Earp, Arizona ranger, rose on one elbow. "I know; I was one of the jaspers that caught those sidewinders. I figured you might be able to get the say-so out of him, if we saved him for you, Wes."

"No chance," answered Wesley Hatfield positively. "He isn't one of these here petty-larceny crooks, Bill. I'm getting right friendly with him, but that's all until I can frame him into a place where he wants to tell me. He's right well educated, Bill, and he knows that unless he talks, nothing can be proved on him. Johnny didn't tell me much about it, but it seems that he killed an old lady and got away with all her jewels—that is, they think he is the man, but there isn't any fingerprints to go on."

"How come Uncle wanting him, then?" asked Bill Earp. "If he did that, I reckon the State gents would be after him."

"Darned if I know," answered Wes. "All I know is that I'm to get out of him where the jewels are and then bring him over."

"I know a couple of old Apaches," Bill said, his eyes on the hills, "that I reckon I could get to ask him some questions, if we could bring him up here in the mountains. A jasper was tellin' me that when those two old *hombres* began askin' things, the gent they're askin' most always tells."

"Well, doggone! How come you talkin' thataway, Bill?" Wes looked at the unrepentant Mr. Earp sternly. "Then it wouldn't be me at all. No suh, I'll bring this gent back with me after he tells me all about it, and he is sure goin' to do 'er—that is, if I can cut the buck."

BILL EARP grinned cheerfully. He had worked on cases with Johnny, and he knew the Hatfield breed full well. The suggestion about the Apaches had been put out as a feeler. He had known what the boy would say before he did it. "Well, if you don't want to put this ornery killer of old ladies to the—the question, what are you aimin' on doin' now?"

"I'm going in and bail him out, if the lawyer that works for Werner hasn't already done it. Then I'll drive him back. He's been playing up to me for about a month. I reckon he's got some kind of a proposition to offer, and has been sizing me up. Bill, our frame sure worked, didn't it? That day you phoned me they had started

from Yuma and I cracked up right where they could get an eyeful—and the Monckton gang you told me about, and—"

"Four months ago," answered Bill. "My gosh, how much time have you got to get this jasper—all your life? No wonder—"

"Go on," said Mr. Wesley Hatfield, from Kentucky. "Finish it, why don't you?" His eyes were cold and wintry as he stared at the grinning Mr. Earp.

"I dassen't," Bill said plaintively. "If you do shoot me, make it quick and painless—please suh."

"Shucks!" grinned Wes. "You aint worth no hunk of lead, you ornery polecat!" —which was telling Mr. Earp that he was once more in good standing.

"How about me easin' down a little closer?" asked Bill. "Maybe-so they'll tumble to you—reckon it would come in right handy if it so come that Sam Earp and Chick Absolom and I happened to be hunting in that way."

"That's right, Bill. It sure would—although if they did tumble, reckon I'd have to tote the load myself, as far as I could, anyway."

"Well," said Bill, as he began to wiggle back into the underbrush, "we'll do 'er—on general principles."

"Glad to have you," answered Wes politely, as he got in the car, but he didn't look overjoyed, at that.

HE drove into Yuma, found Danton, who told him that Mac had been bailed out, probably let out in the custody of Federal agents; and that he, Mac, had disappeared. Danton said that Rizetta was still "tight" and had refused to talk at all. He told Skybo that the bail had been set at ten thousand dollars on a smuggling charge, and added: "Not so good. Joe and Bill are cooked if they show over the line—in Arizona, anyway. The Federal cops will knock them off on what Mac swore to. Any United States Commissioner will issue the warrants."

"How much bond for Rizetta? I mean how much will it take to get a bondsman? I got a grand on me."

"That will do it. I can get plenty of bondsmen for that. He'll be sprung in a half an hour."

"Go ahead. Tell him I'll pick him up on the spring road about a mile out. Also tell him I say to lay off booze until we get back. I'll pass the word to Joe and Bill soon as I get back, though I don't think they'll do it. They think that Mac didn't know much."

"Like hell he didn't know much! You tell 'em that he knew all about a lot of things, and there isn't a depot left that he didn't tell about—or who was handling the stuff also. Man, he threw up right, I'm here to tell you. He may have been a dick himself—that's what I think."

RIZETTA, young, suave, good-looking, sat beside Skybo as he drove south. Rizetta was well educated; since boyhood he had been an international crook and ruthless killer of whoever stood in his way.

"What happened to Mac?" asked Skybo as they crossed the line.

"What happens to many who pretend to be men," answered Rizetta lazily. "All the world over it happens. Men—when the time comes to be men—show they are not. One of the so-brave Government police struck him with a blackjack between the chin and the ear. You know what that does to a man? It makes him very, very sick. He must be a man, to keep on being—what is it you say? Oh, yes, to keep on being of the boiled-hard. Mac—was not a man; that is all."

"How much did he tell?"

"All he knew—of the plant at Juanmez, of the place where you land, of Werner and Ganer, of Mexico City, of the men who receive the shipments."

"How do you know what he told?" demanded Skybo. "Were you there when he did?"

"No, but I have a friend—a police captain. He was there, and he told me."

"Yeah? Well, it looks as if Werner and Ganer were done—down here at least."

"But yes. See, Skybo— What a name! You have a proud one, not?"

"Not," answered Skybo shortly. "Not down here, anyway."

Rizetta laughed. "It is as I thought. I also have a proud name—but not down here. See, Skybo, it is of the finals. This Werner and Ganer, what do they amount to? Little cheap thieves, that is all—with their load of this and their load of that. It is to laugh many times with me. They will stay and get caught, trying to save a few dollars and their names of being hard men. I am so far above them that—"

"Tell it to them," Skybo interrupted. "You are talking pretty hard yourself. Let's see you tell Joe and Bill to their faces that they are a couple of cheap nucks.

"Quit it, gents—this is no time for a display of hardware. Let your arm come straight, Joe; Bill, bring that gat up from under the table."

There would be a new face in the Italian angels' chorus right after, old kid Rizetta."

"Yes?" questioned Rizetta, his eyes flaming. "You think I am afraid of them?"

"I don't know whether you are or not—and I don't give a damn. I got myself to look after. I was jake alone, without any Mac or anyone else to squeal on me; I was a fool to tie in with Werner and Ganer."

"So was I. But with me it was a good place to be—to be forgotten for a little while. You think I am just a man that may be sent to guard a load of stuff, that can wear a gun, as guard? I am—"

"I'll bet you are," grinned Skybo as he turned to the right. "You're a gang all by yourself. All I ever saw you do was hang a gun on yourself—and be the first to get to the table and the last to leave it. You always acted as if you were the Count of Bologny or the Duke of Naples. What you are is a little wop that—"

"Wait," said Rizetta softly, "don't say it. Of the drinks I have had several and—and I want to be friends with you, Skybo."

"I'll take it back," said Skybo with a grin. "I can see you have been taking of the several—also smell it."

"I'm sorry." Rizetta leaned back away from him. "I am ready to pull out also. No man can well work alone—and I would like to have you with me. With your ability to fly, and mine, we could make many times the money that these fools are making. We can go tonight, and reach San Francisco—then sail for Japan and the Orient. I know where there are priceless vases and jades that a flyer could—"

"Just like that!" laughed Skybo. "You didn't have enough money to get a bondsman, let alone get to Japan! I like you, Rizetta, and think you are there in a jam—but I'm going to work alone."

"Wait," commanded Rizetta. "We are almost back. You think I have no money, or am not of high enough class to work with? I could have put up one hundred times the amount of the bond, and still have ten times as much left."

"Take another sniff and make it a thousand times," jeered Skybo. "You must have taken a sleigh-ride." But he stopped the car.

"I don't use it," said Rizetta, relaxing. "I will tell you something, so that you may know who is offering you a partnership. You have heard of the De Bracy jewels?"

"Who hasn't? You have them, Rizetta?" The tone was one used when humoring a child, and a scoffing hint in it also.

"Yes," answered Rizetta, "I have them."

"You," said Skybo coldly, as he put the car in gear, "are a damn' liar. Sit over there and keep your mouth shut. I don't like to have people lie to me, feller."

"I am not lying. I have them—worth a million. Listen: an old lady in a big car just outside of London, an equally-as-old chauffeur driving her. The chauffeur resisted—so did she, the old fool! I have the jewels of the Lady Vera de Bracy."

"Well—what of it? Monckton and Carewe had lots of jewels they got that way, and were afraid to pass out."

"Monckton and Carewe! You knew them, Skybo?"

"I ought to." Skybo grinned. "Here, I'll tell you something: I'm Langdon's brother that used to fly for them. I was learning to fly, so that I could go to work for them also, when they got knocked off. I don't mind tying up with a man, Rizetta, but it has got to be with a man of my own class. I'm going after big game, and—"

"I am the Prince Andrew Vaccaro, in Italy," interrupted Rizetta simply.

"You? Of the Vaccaro family? My brother has told me of them. You did some work with Monckton and Carewe and my brother in France."

"But yes. I knew them well. You will come with me?"

"I will if you can show me that you have enough money to carry us properly. We will have to buy planes and a yacht."

"I have plenty in a safety-deposit box in —a city by the sea."

"All right," answered Skybo shortly. "You show me that you have, and help Joe and Bill get away if they want to go—and I'll throw in with you. How about ready money to go on? You wont dare to offer any of the jewels for sale."

"In the box there is twenty grand, my Skybo. We will sell the jewels to some mandarin in China—then steal them back."

Skybo laughed: "Fair enough, old kid. We'll do that little thing."

As he turned into the driveway leading to the hacienda he added, "But first we must help Joe and Bill—if they need us."

WERNER and Ganer listened to what Skybo and Rizetta had to tell them, and after they had finished to the last word, Ganer laughed. "That's a hot one," he sneered. "So Mac didn't know a thing. That's right, he didn't—except the whole works. There is your Federal dick for you, Werner. Well, that's plenty for me. I have a feeling it's going to rain, and I haven't an umbrella. I think I'll start from here for that dear Brazil. *Adios, amigos!*"

"That's a damn' fine place for guys with cold feet," snarled Werner. "I always thought you had a yellow streak that ran all the way around and lapped."

Ganer's hand dipped like a swallow going to its nest—and it remained in his pocket. Werner saw the movement, and his right arm was straightening. It also stopped, halfway. Skybo had drawn his .45, so fast that before Ganer's hand had touched the butt of the gun in his pocket, it was out and full on them.

"I will kill the first man of you two who moves," he said softly, all reckless laughter and joking gone from his voice. It was the slow, deadly, menacing drawl of a killer, and both Ganer and Werner knew it.

Rizetta's eyes widened a little as Skybo drew, but he was not far behind. His gun also flashed out of his holster.

Ganer laughed. "We can't stand here all day, Skybo. Where do we go from here?"

"It may be straight to hell. You both, with your damn' snarling at each other and would-be gun-plays, are taking us to the cleaner with you. We came back to help you get away, and if you start a shootin' here, none of us will go. These Spigs will mop up on what's left and take all the stuff. Rizetta and I are all washed up as far as this gang goes, but we want out alive. How many white men are here, Werner?"

"Two—and about ten or twelve Spigs. The Sniffling Kid has taken it on the lam. You're right, Skybo. If we started a gun-play, they'd mop up later, and there's a hundred grand worth of stuff here."

"I don't give a damn about the stuff, but I do about me. I've just started in the game, and I'm not going to get knocked off on account of a couple of lads that act like dogs with the distemper. Now, both of you ease off. When I say 'Now!' you crook your arm, Werner. Ganer, you bring your hand out empty. Rizetta, you kill Werner if his arm doesn't crook, and I'll attend to Ganer. We can at least fight our way to my car before the Spigs wake up. We'll get the other two men, load the stuff and take it across. Once there, you can pay Rizetta and me off."

"Fair enough," answered Werner. "Go ahead, Skybo."

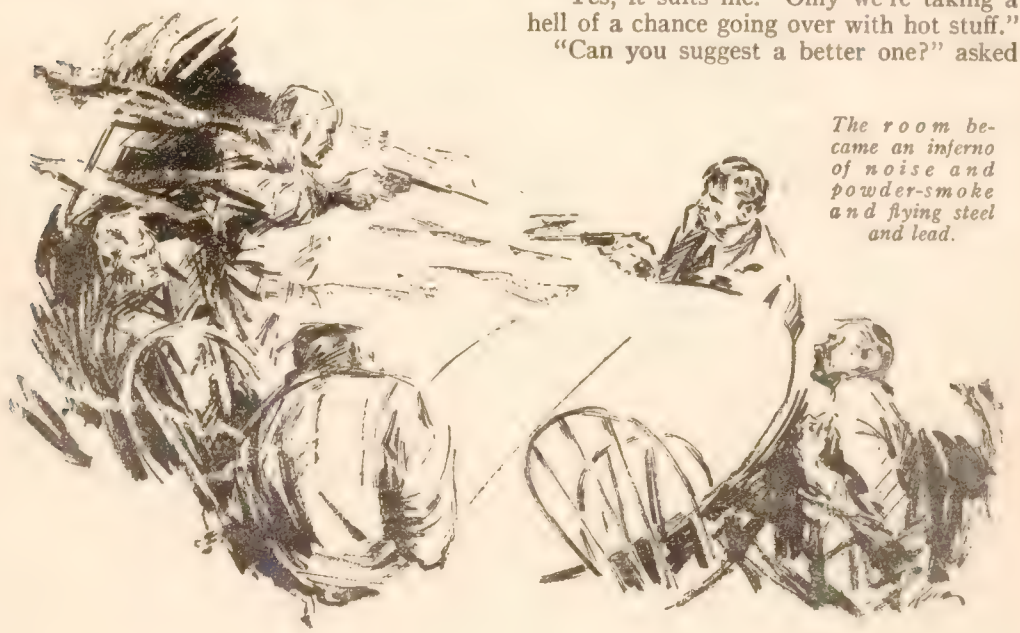
"Jake with me also," Ganer said with a grin. "Once we are over the line with the stuff, and you lads are paid off, we can settle our little matters."

"I don't care what you do—once we are in the clear. *Now!*"

Werner's right arm crooked, and Ganer's hand came out empty. Skybo and Rizetta promptly holstered their guns, and the four men sat down as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. In the last analysis, they were all simon-pure killers, and all men who were unafraid. The fact that Skybo had threatened to kill them made no difference to Werner and Ganer. They would have done exactly the same, themselves.

"It's going to be bad medicine getting across," Werner said. "We can stall the Spigs easy enough while we load up; and if we can't, there are enough of us to make them like it."

"Why not do this?" Skybo said. "The plane will carry four men and all the stuff that is here. You pay us off here, and I'll fly you men and the other two to wherever you say, then come back and get Rizetta."



The room became an inferno of noise and powder-smoke and flying steel and lead.

"Not so good," grinned Ganer. "These two lads are Werner's gorillas. If you landed me with them and all the stuff, I'd be on the spot before you got out of sight, Skybo."

"And there is more truth than poetry in that," sneered Werner.

"You both will be on the spot right here," said Skybo curtly, "if you start that damn' snarling. Well, that's out, then. Only thing is that the Rangers and the Border Patrol and the Customs are all het up, and there are damn' few places where a couple of cars can cross without getting knocked off. Here, Gomez's goat-ranch is a safe place to land, and over the line. I'll take Rizetta, one of your men, Werner, and Ganer over with half the stuff. Then I'll come back and get Werner, the rest of the stuff and the other man. Once we're all there, you two can split up your layout, and Rizetta and I will take Ganer with us to the coast. You both know damn' well that Rizetta and I only want what is coming to us—and for part of mine, I will take the plane. We'll see fair play and an even break all the way through. You birds have plenty of time after that to start the gunning stuff. How's that?"

Both Werner and Ganer sat silently for a moment, searching for flaws and for possible advantages; then both smiled and nodded. "That is the only way to do it," Werner said. "That suit you, Ganer?"

"Yes, it suits me. Only we're taking a hell of a chance going over with hot stuff."

"Can you suggest a better one?" asked Werner suavely. "Of course, if you wish, you may go with Skybo and Rizetta right now, and I'll take a chance on getting across with the stuff and my men. I can send you your cut—to Brazil."

"You could, that's right—but would you? No, I think I'll take the chance, Werner. And the sooner we get started, the better. I wouldn't put it by those damn' Rangers to come over here after us, line or no line."

"And that," said Skybo gayly, once more with the reckless lilt in his voice, "is where you are talking good sense, Mr. Ganer."

THERE was absolutely no attempt at interference by the Mexican gunmen who had been hired as guards as the plane was loaded. The white men worked indifferently and calmly as ever, and when the plane took off with Rizetta, one of Werner's men, Ganer and fifty-odd thousand dollars' worth of drugs, half the Mexicans had gone back to sleep in the shade.

As Skybo came out of the shack Gomez called his "hacienda," Rizetta joined him.

"You will hurry back, my Skybo? See, this is the first time I have been across the line since I landed and put the jewels away in a safe place. I am well able to take care of myself in the city, but this land—I do not like."

"I'll be back in two hours—or at the latest, say three. We can land Ganer wherever he wants, and then we can get to whatever city you say, old kid."

"It is too bad," said Rizetta with an evil smile, "that we must see these fellows go away with a hundred thousand dollars in so-easily-handled stuff."

Skybo looked at him, then laughed. "We would have to kill four of them—we might, at that, if we got a break. Wait till I get back with the rest. I'll try and figure out a play. If I can, I'll say, 'All right, Rizetta, le's go,' and we'll try for them."

"I will be ready, my Skybo," answered the Italian killer, with a cold smile.

AS Skybo landed again at the old hacienda below the line and taxied to a halt, Werner came up with the other man. "How come it took you so long to make it?" he asked. He knew that with the speed the plane could develop Skybo ought to have got back an hour before.

"One of the struts worked loose," answered Skybo. "See—on the left wing. And also," he went on with a grin as they walked towards the house, "Mr. Rizetta delayed me." —But it had been Bill Earp, not Rizetta, who delayed him.

"That wop? What in hell did he want?"

"Why, he wanted me to throw in with him and knock you all off as soon as you were all together. He suggested that we could do it easy enough and then fly up into the blue with all the stuff."

"What? That hand-painted shoestring wanted—well, for Pete's sake!" Werner cursed vilely for a moment, then: "What did you tell him, Skybo?"

"Why, I told him I didn't think we could cut the mustard, and anyway, as long as I was working for a lad, I wouldn't do anything like that."

"When I get there," snarled Werner, "I'll show that wop some gun-work, the dirty—"

"What for?" interrupted Skybo. "I don't want him killed. Lay off him, Werner, or I will show you some gun-work, no foolin'."

Werner stopped and looked at Skybo, his eyes narrowing. "You don't want him killed? Why?"

"Because," answered Skybo calmly, "he's got a lot of jewels hid away somewhere, and I'm playing to get 'em. Then you can kill him all you want to."

"I know where they are, Skybo," Werner said softly. "Mike, you go and get the stuff loaded in the plane." The gorilla-like Mike started off without a word.

"You do? How come?" asked Skybo, surprised.

"Easy. He was in Los Angeles when he joined up. I wasn't taking any chances on him, though I knew he was right. I put a bird-dog on him, and before he came down, he went to San Bardoo. The bird-dog was right behind him, and at the First Trust Safety Deposit vaults, was right alongside of him waiting to take a box when Rizetta took one. What jewels has he got, Skybo, and how did you know?"

"He told me—when he asked me to throw in with him. He didn't tell me where they were, though. I told him that we must help you and Ganer get away, then we would go and get the jewels and sail for the Orient. The jewels are Lady de Bracy's. Rizetta bumped her off, her and her driver."

WERNER swore softly under his breath. "A million, easy," he said, "and that wop had that much all the time! The bird-dog couldn't go in with him while he planted them. If I'd only known! I would have burnt them out of him. What's the game, Skybo?"

"No game, for you," answered Skybo indifferently. "I'm going to bell him along until he gets them, then take him for a nice ride."

"Let me in. I'll arrange the ride thing. I know the works in San Bardoo, and you don't. I can put it over without a comeback."

"Jake with me, only this: how soon can you get to San Bardoo? I can fly there in five hours."

"I can make it with a car by morning. You stall him along until then. Hell, he can't get in the vaults until nine, anyway. Then bring him to Ike Dorrin's place on Carter Street. I'll be there—don't worry."

"I'm not. If you want in, your split will be a fifth."

"That's fine, Skybo. You and I can clean up some real jack once we are rid of these mission stiffs." And while Werner

was saying it, he was thinking: *"A fifth? All of it, you mean—you poor young fool! You'll go on the ride also."*

And if he could have read the mind behind the impassive face of Skybo, he would have read: *"You'll be dead or in jail long before I reach San Bardoo, Werner!"*

Mike slouched over. "She's loaded," he grunted, and five minutes later the graceful plane spiraled up to get altitude, then straightened up due north.

RIZETTA rose from a corner as they entered the one-room shack, and staggered forward to meet them. He had found a jug of mescal, that deadly brew of the Southwest and of Mexico, and had been drinking steadily. Ganer and the other man of Werner's were both cold sober, but Rizetta was far gone, so far that he had lost all sense of caution.

Skybo took one look at him as he came forward, and in that look learned that all his plans to get Rizetta to where the jewels were and take him with them on him, had been smashed by a jug of mescal. Rizetta shouted: "Ha! It is you, Skybo! Now we will take them *à main armée! Allons!"*

Skybo and the rest of the men in the room did not understand all he said; but they all fully understood the movement of his right hand that went with it. It was like a match being ignited in a black-powder-mill room. Werner, thinking that Ganer had framed with Rizetta, fired straight at Ganer, who had started to rise. The bullet went home, but as he pitched forward, Ganer, gun-fighter and killer, shot twice at Werner. The room became an inferno of noise and powder-smoke and flying steel and lead. The gunmen were using automatics, with steel-jacketed bullets; Wesley Hatfield—Skybo no longer—and Rizetta were shooting the heavy .45 army-type revolvers, with soft-nosed lead bullets. Werner sank slowly to his knees, and as he did, emptied his gun at Rizetta, putting five bullets into the Italian's body.

Rizetta, more than half drunk, had got his gun out but not nearly as fast as he could have if he had been sober. Mike, the gunman of Werner, had been closest to him as he shouted, and had made the mistake of trying to close with Rizetta instead of shooting. The Italian, seeing him clearly coming in, emptied all six cartridges into his body.

The other man, the one who had come with Ganer and Rizetta, stood as if at attention and shot it out with the man whom he had known only as Skybo. His first bullet hit Wesley Hatfield high up on the left shoulder, his second just below the floating ribs on the right side; the third went into the ceiling as he was hurled back against the wall as if hit by a giant hammer. Wesley Hatfield, special agent, U. S., in spite of the numbing shock of two bullets in him, had sent six soft-nosed lead bullets into a space that could have been covered with a playing-card, over the man's heart. Before the sound of the last shot died away, the door burst open and the room filled with grim-faced, tanned Rangers with Bill Earp in front. They stood there looking down at five men on the floor and at the youth who stood swaying, gun still in hand.

"Well, you doggone young polecat!" said Bill Earp bitterly, as he came to take Wesley in his arms to ease him to the floor, "You didn't leave none a-tall for us. You're as bad as that durn' brother Johnny of yours!"

Wesley rested one hand on the table and stopped swaying. He regarded the Rangers gravely for an instant, then announced solemnly as he went back against Bill Earp's arm: "I'm right lucky to be left myself. The jewels are in the First Trust and Safety Deposit vaults in San Bardoo. I was goin' to—take him away with me—before—you' got here, and—"

WHEN he next opened his eyes, he looked up at a white ceiling. The world had stopped spinning around like a top, and the light had come back. His eyes went to the face of the man sitting by the bed.

"Howdy, Johnny," he said weakly.

John Hatfield grinned cheerfully in return; then said, sternly: "You go right back to sleep, you hear me? Doggone, scarin' us all to death this way!"

"I will—only I reckon I—I failed, Johnny. I got him over, but—"

"Will you go to sleep if I tell you?" demanded Johnny. "First, the doctors say you will be all right in two more weeks; that's that. Second, your last remark to Bill Earp was all we needed. Rizetta'd rented the box under the name of Vaccaro, and Uncle sure made them open it up. You mopped up, boy, and Cap Saunders is tickled pink! Go to sleep and get well so you can go out and get killed some more."

"I will, Johnny," said young Hatfield; and he turned over on the pillow, and did.

A Lothario at Large

You can lead a boy to a Pullman,
but you can't make him porter. . . .
One of Mr. Akers' joyous best.

By ARTHUR K. AKERS

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

A BOY never could tell how a lie was going to work until he tried it. And then it was generally too late to do anything about it. With which bit of philosophy creating crinkles in his brow, Ipecac Ingalls, undersized and overcolored, approached his residence northeast by north, nautically speaking.

In the present instance Ipecac's caution was due to active speculation on his part as to just how his Amazonian wife Susie was going to take the absence he was just bringing to a close. And that, in turn, depended largely on how much Susie knew, believed or discovered regarding his late activities in the colored colony known as Tuxedo Junction. For the last thing Ipecac —or the insurance company that carried his accident policy—would care to have Susie cognizant of was the social swath approximately four blocks wide and forty-eight hours long which her cautiously returning husband had been cutting through the heart of Tuxedo Junction's feminine contingent—with especial reference to one chocolate-complexioned lady out there who was known to Ipecac favorably but solely as Ammonia.

Mr. Ingalls sighed regretfully now as he shuffled across his home alley. When a boy as attractive to the womenfolks as Ipecac married a woman as strong-armed and strong-minded as Susie, there was always a risk that the path of glory would lead but to his grave. That was what was heavy upon Mr. Ingalls' mind now. Besides, the best-looking girls — like Ammonia — frequently turned out to be married—to the largest and roughest sort of husbands. Than which nothing could be more disconcerting to a Lothario-at-large like Ipecac. In this case Ammonia's better fraction had recently proved not only athletic in appearance and actions, but he had worn razors in *both* his shoes—which departure from the normal in armament was why Ipecac was now back in Alley G and owing somebody for damages to the panel of fence that had momentarily got in his way during the seven swift seconds it had taken him to shake the mud of Tuxedo from his flying feet, a flight in which Ipecac had left everything behind him but his right name and address.

And now it was time to see if any storm signals were flying over the home port. He cast an inquiring glance therefore at the domestic barometer—otherwise Trombone, the family dog. Trombone slept blissfully in the dust before the door, however—sure sign that all was well within. So far!

IPECAC, approaching the open door with discretion, fetched forth a deep groan especially designed and nurtured for the occasion.

"Come in dis house!" A familiar feminine voice preceded the appearance of the able-bodied Susie in the doorway. "Whar at you been dese las' two days? An' *wid who*, huh?"

"Jes' gittin' out de hawspital," returned Ipecac with a fresh groan. "Wuz he'pin' 'nother boy load a truck, an' de load slipped. I come home jes' soon's dey lemme—"

Just here the watchful Ipecac weakened. Trombone, infallible forecaster of trouble, had gone hastily under the house, with his tail tight-tucked. Susie was closing and unclosing her fists in the way that indicated that Ipecac had again fallen short on a fabrication.

"Nemmind standin' dar lyin' to me!" Susie interjected sharply. "Any time *you* he'ps anybody work, 'possums stahts growin' tail-feathers! 'Sides, I got plenty else on my mind dan list'nin' to you lie. I done got you a good job—"

Ipecac rustled up another groan. A real one this time. Susie was all the time forgetting the misery in a boy's back, and hiring him out to somebody to do rough work and lots of it.

"—Blue suit wid brass buttons," she resumed.

"Dey kill a nigger is he git on de po-lice fo'ce heah!" demurred Ipecac earnestly.

"Aint say po-lice—says *po'ter!*" snapped Susie. "Pullman car white folks been tryin' to find a 'sperienced nigger to fit li'l sawed-off unifawm dey got over to the Tu'm'nal station dar—"

"Dat kind job keep me away from *you* all time," further objected Ipecac. He had about used up all his honeyed words out in Tuxedo, but here was the time and place to employ any remaining ones in the bottom of his bin.

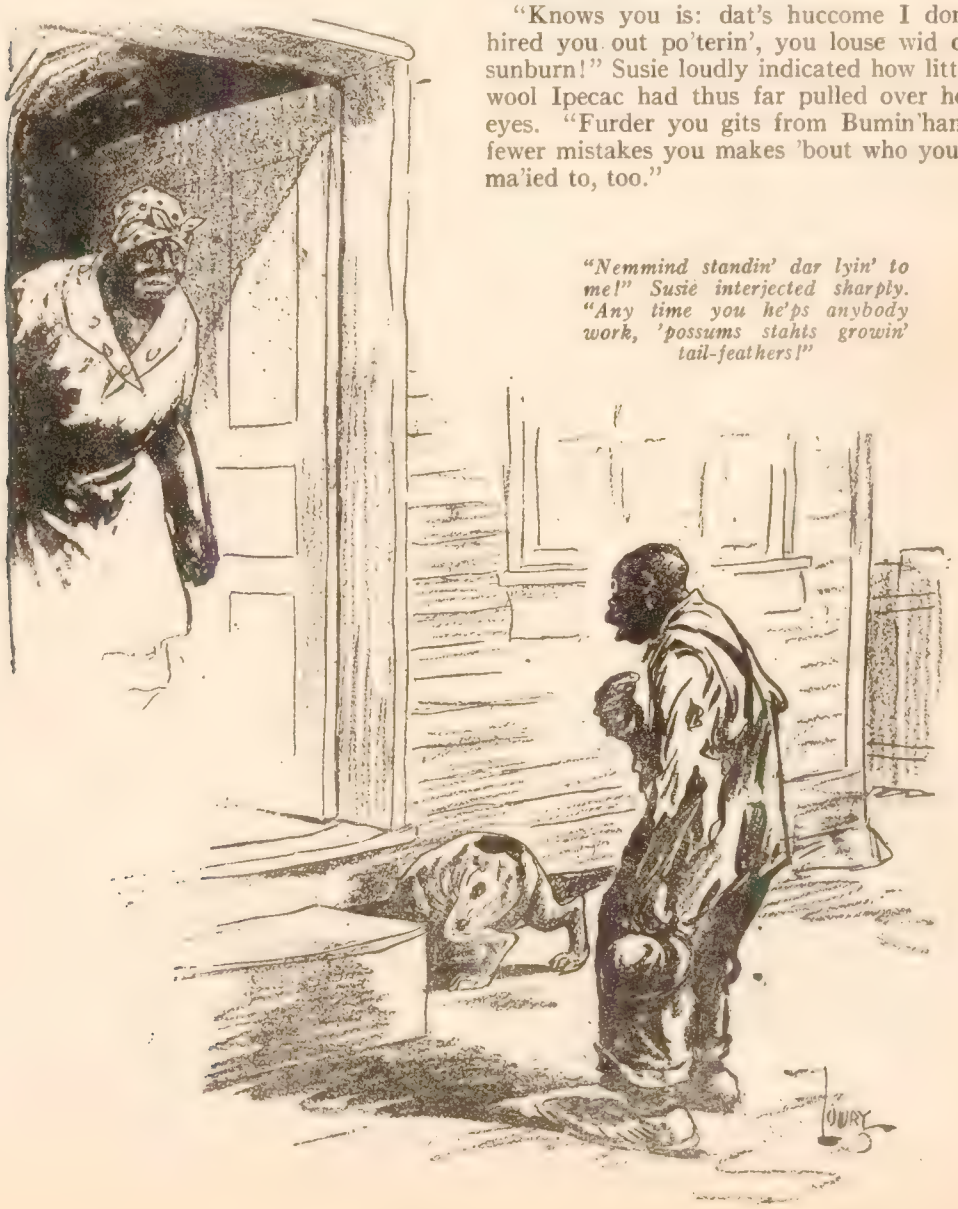
"You still aint thunk up nothin' whut I cain't stand," countered Susie.

"I aint gwine po'ter none," announced Ipecac—all the more firmly for its being under his breath.

"Mumbles which?"

"Says I got too much business to 'tend to heah in Bumin'ham to be ridin' off from hit all time—"

"Knows you is: dat's huccome I done hired you out po'terin', you louse wid de sunburn!" Susie loudly indicated how little wool Ipecac had thus far pulled over her eyes. "Furder you gits from Bumin'ham, fewer mistakes you makes 'bout who you's ma'ied to, too."



"Nemmind standin' dar lyin' to me!" Susie interjected sharply. "Any time you he'ps anybody work, 'possums stahts growin' tail-feathers!"

IPECAC sighed. He had other plans than portering just now—just as soon as it was safe for him around Tuxedo Junction again. Yet opposing Susie openly was no way to found a personal health program.

"An' I aint finish tellin' you de real news," Susie interrupted him further and ominously. "I wants you to dust about an' git yo'se'f some class. My cousin's comin' from 'cross town, in Ensley, to put on de new degree at de lodge tomorrer night. He gwine stay wid us while he so busy at de Temple. An' is you act natu'al round him jes' once, I vac'um-clean you wid a hoe-handle—you heah me?"

"Aint know yo' cousin," grumbled Ipecac. "Aint even see him at ouah weddin'."

"Boy warehousin' as much gin as you wropped yo'se'f around jes' befo' de weddin' couldn't 'ave seen him if he'd been dar," stated Susie scornfully. "But he wa'n't dar: he took sick in de baid when he find out I wuz gwine make de mistake of marryin' wid you, nohow."

Ipecac thought a lot and didn't say it. "When you say he comin'?" he asked instead.

"Tomorrer sometime."

Mr. Ingalls scratched one shank with the side of his other shoe, and perceived anew the difficulty of breaking up a streak of hard luck, once it had really set in. Home barely ten minutes, he had already received two pieces of bad news. And domestic life would be set to a new key and tempo for him until the visit of this lodge dignitary was over. During it his status would be slightly lower than Trombone's and slightly higher than that of a kitchen roach. Ipecac still recalled with bitterness, and with vividness, the international convention in Birmingham of the Sisters and Daughters of Africa, Asia and America—the time Susie had uniformed him and made him wait upon the table in his own home when she gave a dinner to a visiting feminine potentate.

" 'Spects I better git on down to de pool-room—" he essayed an escape.

"All de pool you gwine see," Susie headed him off, "is pool of wawter on de flo' befo' you stahts de scrubbin'. Boy, find yo' bucket!"

At the height of Ipecac's activities he heard the wheels of doom.

AT six Susie surveyed the wreckage—of Ipecac. "You looks all give down," she commented critically. "Too fur down in yo' clo'es an' too fur back in yo' brains. 'Sides dat, you aint de same shape on both sides no mo'."

Ipecac kept down arguments by keeping his mouth shut, except for: "Craves a pohk-chop an' some chitlin's to git up my strength wid!"—croaking thus feebly amid his personal ruins.

"Chitlin's! Boy, you think you's gwine feed on de fat of de land de day befo' comp'ny comes? Lap up dat cawn-braid an' 'lasses now, an' lay low twel mawnin'. . . . . An' yo' baid's out on de back po'ch when you git done. Fixin' up yo' room fo' my cousin to stay in."

Ipecac did the remainder of his groaning internally, where it would attract less of his wife's attention. If this first day of an impending lodge-guest's coming was a sample, something would have to be done about the second. Fortunately—with his sleeping quarters temporarily moved to the outside of the house already—there could be.

In case of doubt, try a plate of barbecue, was Ipecac's lifelong habit—with indulgence in it simplified this time by his boudoir having been so summarily removed to the back porch. Ipecac went to bed, therefore, with his clothes on. But not for long. And thirty minutes more found him optimistically ensconced upon a stool in the barbecue stand connected with the Royal Presidential Hotel for Colored—Steam Heat in Every Room. On one side of him, a visiting nonentity from Bessemer offered little

opportunity of thrift on Ipecac's part by standing treat for the barbecue. But on the other, exuding amiability, was one who was to prove himself the next changer of the course of human events for Ipecac.

A boy could never tell whether Susie was cooking for him too, or not. Trombone and Ipecac were two souls with but a single thought: breakfast.

Not that Mr. "Bees Knees" Thompson, late of Demopolis, looked at the moment like a shift in anybody's destiny, engaged as he was in ladling barbecue aboard his person with all the verve and keen appreciation for a good piece of merchandise that having been a barbecue-stand proprietor in his home town naturally engendered in him.

"Why Eat At Home—We Are Open," was the unanswerable placard that was on the very eve of abstracting the last dime from the pocket of Ipecac, when, "Is you wish to care fo' some ba'becue wid me?" questioned Mr. Thompson hospitably.

"Cain't eat but one he'pin," accepted Ipecac modestly, "'count of losin' my app'tite. I's all broke out wid trouble like a bad case of hives in hot weather."

"How long you been ma'ied?" queried Bees Knees with an intelligence in his sympathy that warmed Ipecac to the heels.

"Too long!" answered Mr. Ingalls with fervor. "How *you* know I's ma'ied?"

"All de buttons sewed on yo' coat—an' all de shine off yo' face."

"I's mo' of a he'per dan a husban'," outlined Ipecac. "An' my wife fixin' have comp'ny. Big lodge-man comin'. Me an' my dawg Trombone git anything de comp'ny aint want."

"You does look cas' down an' put upon, sho 'nough," agreed Bees Knees. Then, speculatively: "I got a friend 'cross town whut plenty times he'ps a boy out of trouble like yourn jes' by visitin' in de home an' talkin' things over wid de wife at de dinner-table. He say, in heaps of cases, de dawg gittin' a better deal round de place

dan de husban' is jes' a' accident, an' he c'n fix hit."

"Nobody never done nothin' fo' me fo' nothin'," observed Ipecac without hope.

"A matter whut's bound to git mention' sooner or later, anyhow." Bees Knees leaped for the opening thus left for him. "Maybe you de ve'y man I been lookin' fo', though. Say, you he'p me—an' I he'ps you. Mo' ba'becue I eats, de better you looks to me."

"Dat's way hit work out wid me, too," admitted Ipecac. "Vittles make heap of diff'ence how a man look. Whut you doin' in Bu'min'ham, nohow?"

"De Lawd's work," answered Mr. Thompson unctuously, "I's passin' a paper fo' raisin' money to build a Predest'narian Chu'ch in D'mop'lis."

"How much is de Lawd git?"

"W-e-l-l, He aint git nothin'—yit," deprecated Bees Knees. "Business aint been dat good yit. Lawd gits fawty dollars out of ev'y hund'ed, but de firs' sixty goes to me. Whut I needs is git de womenfolks in'-sted. Dat means staht wid de bigges' lodge lady an' work down. You jes' say a big lodge-party comin' to yo' house? An'—"

Ipecac saw the rest in a rush. Nine hunches, all working at once, couldn't have brought him to a better place or a better prospect.

"I c'n lead you to de largest lodge lady in Al'bama," he stated unequivocally, "—if you makes hit right fo' me. You fix my business round home, an' I lets you listen to de Big Mamma of *all* de lodges round heah! You done come to headquawters, da's all! An' when she puts her name on yo' paper, you might 's well go hire yo'se'f de bass singer fo' your choir, 'ca'ze from den on dat chu'ch *done built!*"

Mr. Ingalls' enthusiasm grew contagious. "You do dat," agreed Bees Knees with equal positiveness, "an' I fotch my friend wid me whut c'n talk yo' wife into sayin' 'Yassuh!' ev'ytime hencefo'th you tells her whar at to git off."

Ipecac's heart and ears stirred feebly. The latter hadn't registered anything so promising in a long time. But, good as the newcomer's statements sounded, they still didn't resemble the utterances of some one who knew Susie. It would be well to put Bees Knees to further test, to tell him the worst before hoping too surely for the best.

"I aint spill ev'ything to you yit," he therefore continued doggedly. "My wife tryin' make a Pullman po'ter out of me—"

"Cain't nobody do dat," interrupted Mr. Thompson with a positiveness that somehow sounded personal. " 'Sides, dey's too many small-town cullud gals comin' down to see de trains go through, up in Ca'linas. I c'n tell right off you's li'ble strut yo'se'f into a jam dat way, wid one dem unifawms on."

"Mention dat to Susie too—de womens follers me about, dat's a fact," admitted Ipecac modestly.

"An' aint nothin' like a unifawm fo' makin' 'em wuss about dat."

"You meet me in front my house—twenty-sevum fift'-nine Alley G—tomorrer round noontime," Ipecac grew definite in another direction, "an' he'p me bust up dis po'terin' notion. Den you'll be jes' right fo' de paper-passin', too."

"Noontime tomorrer—or li'l sooner," confirmed Bees Knees. "An' jes to show you I's on de level, I brings my friend wid me, all set to fix you so you gits mo' social standin' round yo' place dan a millionaire in a po'house. Wait twel yo' wife sees who you's 'sociatin' wid den, too, an' watch her wilt."

"An' I aint got to po'ter, den?"

"Boy, you'll be whut po'ters waits on when us gits done! Whut dat number ag'in?"

"Twenty-sevum fift'-nine—an' *look* in befo' you *goes* in: she might think you wuz me," Mr. Ingalls warned.

IPECAC awoke to the uncertainties of another day. His kitchen was beginning to smell all right, but a boy never could tell whether Susie was cooking for him too, or not. Trombone showed a lot of white in his eye and nervousness in his feet. He and Ipecac were two souls with but a single thought: breakfast.

But this time their twin hopes were realized. In the order named, Susie flung a bone before one and a plate before the other. "Got to be *some* way to keep you out dat dinin'-car twel de white folks gits done eatin' today," she justified her generosity in Ipecac's case. "Po'ters eats last on de 'Lanta line."

Mr. Ingalls laid back his spiritual ears and balked in silence. Despite everything, a boy would have to be deaf not to notice that Susie was already visualizing him on the profit-taking end of a whisk-broom. Ipecac breakfasted and clung stubbornly to his inner resolution not to porter. For he couldn't think of anything more calculated

to interfere with his business around Tuxedo Junction than a long run with longer layovers at the far end. Neither could Susie—which was why her mind was set upon it. Ipecac never had heard about the irresistible force meeting the immovable object, but some such event was in his mind when Susie should finally come up against his anti-portering complex, reinforced by the redoubtable Bees Knees' persuasive friend. Until that time, Ipecac said nothing and sawed battercakes.

Under the influence of the food and promised deliverance, his mind cleared further. Bees Knees and his friend would fix everything. It was a promise. Ipecac cheered to the point of asking for a third egg—and not getting it. Indeed, there seemed to be something suddenly symbolic about that third egg. Right then and there Ipecac started not getting some more things. A knock at the front door filled him with mingled hope and alarm before he remembered that it was yet too early for the anti-portering and pro-paper-passing combine to call. Nor was Susie's cousin due yet, either.

SUSIE set up vibrations and tremblings in the loosely built shack as she lumbered toward the front door to answer the knock. Shortly after which the surrounding atmosphere took up the business of vibrating and trembling as Susie answered not only the knock but, evidently, eleven-tenths of what the knocker had to say. In fact, it would be perfectly noticeable to anyone within a couple of blocks that somebody was getting turned down, hard. Susie was at her vocal best as she slammed back into that portion of the house where her lord and master continued to breakfast apprehensively.

"Man wid nine child'en passin' a paper to git up money fo' a awphan 'sylum fo' he chu'ch!" she snorted explanatorily as she moved the remaining eggs well back out of Ipecac's reach. "Aint nothin'—'cep' a husband—dat pester me more 'n a paper-passin' nigger!"

Ipecac suddenly and disastrously remembered something, and showed the whites of his eyes at the memory. Nothing in Susie's remarks or the motion of her skillet-arm sounded or looked like *Welcome to Our City* when his church-building friend with the subscription list should show up—which would but increase the severity of the labors thus laid out for the eminent adjuster of domestic discords who was scheduled to accompany him. All in all, it began to look as though Ipecac had been unduly influenced toward optimism by the barbecue and big talk of the previous evening. Even Trombone could tell that this was distinctly the wrong morning for approaching Susie with a subscription paper.

Vague thoughts of posting himself at the mouth of Alley G with a red flag in the interest of longevity on the part of Bees Knees and his influential friend began to mingle in Ipecac's head with more definite ones of boarding an outbound freight train. But, again, trains reminded him of Pullman cars and portering—the precise thing he was out to avoid. You could lead a boy to a Pullman but you couldn't make him porter, was Ipecac's stubborn stand.

Frantically his mind began to dash about within the four walls of his newest dilemma. Selling Susie on the idea in advance—if possible—seemed the best, indeed the only hope of escape. Preparation of her mind for impending events forthwith became Ipecac's policy.

"Fo' out of five niggers in D'mop'lis cain't git inside de Predest'narian Chu'ch dar now," he opened his feeble argument to her. "Hit's too small—"

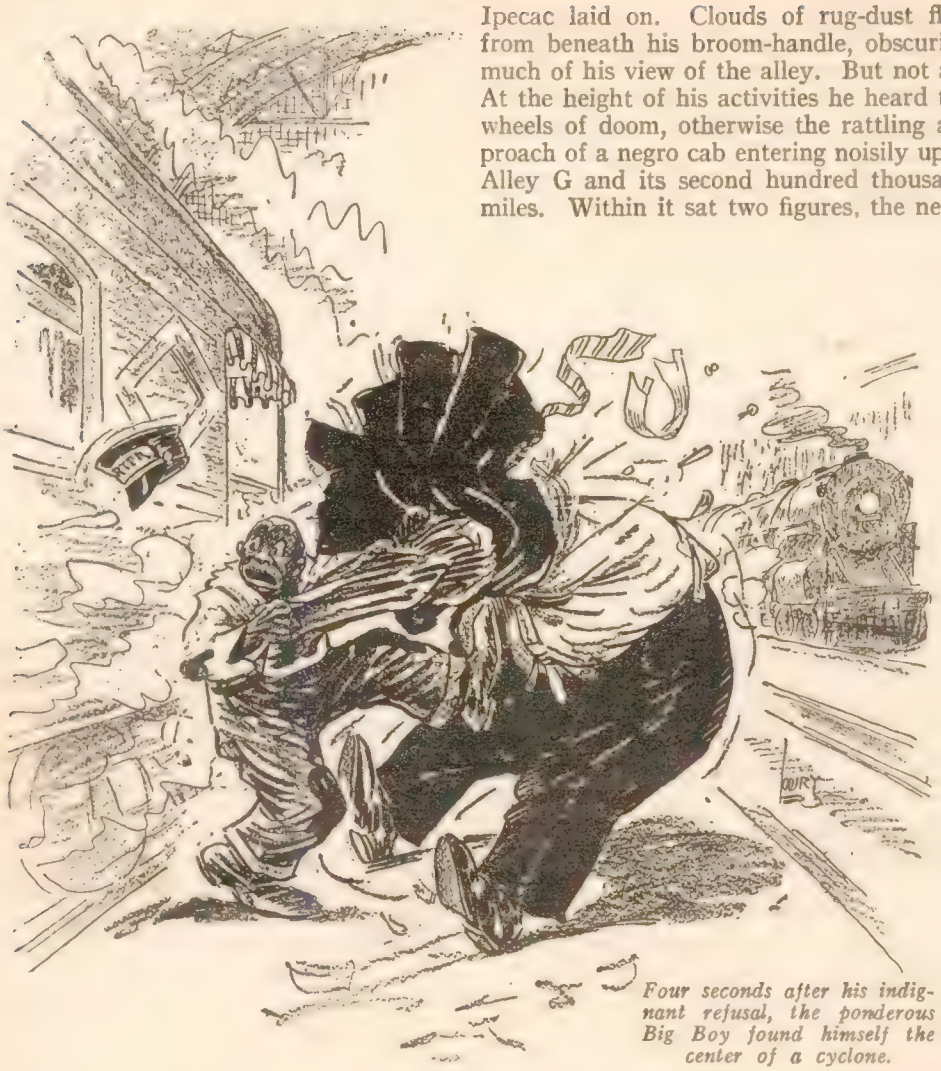
"Yeah, an' fo' out of five niggers in Bumin'ham cain't git inside dat unifawm dey got over at de Tu'minal station fo' you—hit's too small, too," Susie yanked the conversation firmly back into place. "White man say fo' you be dar at two 'clock: dey's too much class to de noon train fo' boy like you—you goes out on de three-fawty fo' New Yawk."

Mr. Ingalls watched the clouds begin to roll up along his personal horizon. Ammonia and Tuxedo Junction began to fade. Despite the fact, Ipecac had to get back to Tuxedo—for Ammonia's desirable sake and because it was about the last place in which her violent husband would expect to find Ipecac again.

MEANTIME—and regardless—it behooved Mr. Ingalls to hustle back to the Royal Presidential in an endeavor to warn the unsuspecting Bees Knees that this was no day to pass papers in Alley G, no matter how worthy the cause, how great the need of the passer. Some totally different scheme was going to be necessary, instead, to avert portering and improve Ipecac's personal standing around his home.

"Now whar at you gwine?" demanded Susie, however, as he began edging toward the gate on that errand.

Ipecac laid on. Clouds of rug-dust flew from beneath his broom-handle, obscuring much of his view of the alley. But not all. At the height of his activities he heard the wheels of doom, otherwise the rattling approach of a negro cab entering noisily upon Alley G and its second hundred thousand miles. Within it sat two figures, the near-



Four seconds after his indignant refusal, the ponderous Big Boy found himself the center of a cyclone.

"Got to see a boy on business—round on Fo'th Avenue. He git in a jam if he miss me now," replied Ipecac wretchedly.

"Is anybody want to see you, all dey got do is come round heah an' watch you makin' merry 'mongst de rugs," Susie changed his mind and destination for him. "You jes' is got time to git dat front room rug over de clo'es-line an' finish beatin' hit befo' my cousin come."

Ipecac's present grew as dark as his face and future. Yet consequences of arguing with Susie ranked among the preventable accidents. So if Bees Knees and his friend lost out for lack of support on Ipecac's home grounds, it was like the impending visit of Susie's cousin—something Mr. Ingalls could dread but not divert.

Noon neared. Heavy of heart and hand, side one readily identifiable as Bees Knees. Frantically through the clouds of carpet-dust Ipecac made signs—signs indicative of warning, of the desirability of postponement, of the fallacy of passing a paper in Susie's direction at this particular moment.

The cab rolled unheeding, however, to a stop, Bees Knees' important friend chatting easily the while with his companion. Despairingly Ipecac heard their knock, heard Susie lumbering on her way to answer it. Whereupon imagination did much for Ipecac. Wild thoughts followed, of commandeering the cab and making his getaway. But these faded before the fruitless fumblings he conducted in the pockets where he kept his nickels when he was in funds. Feebly, therefore, he returned to his rug-beating, against the flight of the

callers and the return of Susie to galvanize him into resumption of violent effort. Any minute now her conversation with her callers was liable to take a sudden turn for the worse, leaving Ipecac a porter upon the sands of time. Any minute the front door was liable to be flung open to accommodate the Retreat from Moscow of Bees Knees and his visiting friend. And with them would go all hope of fixing Ipecac's business in the interest of Tuxedo Junction and his next date with Ammonia.

But, strangely, the moments continued to pass minus an outbreak. As five more went by without disturbance of the peace, Ipecac began to weaken in his pessimism. In selling Susie, the first sixty seconds were always the hardest. And now ten times that period had passed without mayhem. Encouraged, he began to recall anew the charm and persuasiveness of Bees Knees the previous evening. If his friend were even half so able in that direction, perhaps even Susie could not resist their combined blandishments after all. They might be putting it over for Ipecac even now!

So again Ipecac lightened up on his beating and bore down on his listening. Finally, emboldened by the absence of any barrage —verbal or material—from Susie, he ceased his labors altogether. Nothing but a pleasant murmur could be heard issuing from the front room where Susie was entertaining and being entertained by her callers. Mr. Ingalls cast doubt, despair and all unworthy thoughts from him. He had simply overestimated Susie and had misjudged the powers of Bees Knees and Company. Undoubtedly now everything—including the portering—had been adjusted amicably. This was well, for Tuxedo Junction called and New York didn't. Those two localities didn't mix in Ipecac's business, was all.

Therefore and at length, an Ipecac all a-beam as to expression, a-strut as to gait, when the summons finally came from Susie. He would show these visitors how the head of a house entered it—easily but nevertheless firmly. Not even the fact that Trombone continued to remain closely under the house disturbed him, in the face of all the circumstantial evidence about the place. As a barometer, Trombone merely hadn't kept up with the changes around the old homestead. This was a new day and a new deal. It was even in Ipecac's mind to speak to Susie publicly in a moment about the way habit yet held her, in respect to the tone of voice with which she had just yelled in his direction: "Hey, you, Ip'cac! Stir yo' stumps an' *come in dis house!* You heah me?"

Ipecac came. He saw. He conq—

OVER at the Terminal Station, at eleven fifty-eight A. M., something small, black and fast went over the spiked iron railings outside the train-shed beneath which the twelve-one express for New York roaringly awaited the flash of the signal that would release it.

At eleven fifty-nine, "Big Boy" Keaton, largest and flabbiest of Pullman porters, answered an urgent summons emanating from the region on the opposite side of his train from the platform—where he stood waiting to swing aboard his car—and received a hitherto unheard-of request.

Four seconds after his indignant refusal, the ponderous Big Boy found himself the center of a cyclone, one that battered and hustled him, that stripped him of his coat and cap, and left him bewildered, panting in his pants and shirt and shoes in futile efforts to overtake the now rapidly moving train—the train which the same cyclone, Big Boy's coat and cap firmly gripped in one hand, had barely managed to swing aboard of as it pulled out.

Beneath the First Avenue viaduct Big Boy gave up, in darkness and despair. No one as astonished as he by what had befallen him could make speed, anyway!

Indeed, it was only well beyond the Sixty-eighth Street crossing that any adequate explanation appeared to the few puzzled passengers that had witnessed the assault upon Big Boy—appeared in the shape of the cyclone talking to himself in the washroom of car S-7, and lost in the voluminous blue expanse of Big Boy's uniform coat; while from beneath the Size 9 cap that overhung Ipecac's bulletlike head like eaves on a bungalow issued a low mumble that clarified all things, from flight to fight:

"'Bleeged to do hit!" came the voice from beneath the cap. "Aint no time to wait round fo' de three-fawty train when I sees whut I sees. An' one thing 'bout dis heah po'terin'—hit gits you way from town whar trouble is, fast! Says I aint gwine po'ter none—but dat wuz befo' I goes in de house an' sees too much. . . . . How I gwine know Bees Knees' big-fixin' friend wuz de lodge cousin Susie 'spectin'? An' *dat Ammonia gal's husban', too?* . . . . Po'ter, Cap'n? Bresh 'em off, suh?"

Don't You Cry, Susanna!

The old wild days in Idaho live vivid again in this dramatic story by the author of "The Stolen Stampede."

By REGINALD BARKER

Illustrated by Allen Moir Dean

PLACERVILLE was dying, as a gold-camp dies when its treasure has been ravished. Vainly she fought her despoilers with all the weapons the mountains had loaned her. But neither the horse-flies and heat of summer, the winds, rain and mud in fall, nor winter with its blizzards of swirling snow and temperatures around fifty below zero, availed the mining-camp against the horde of men, who, nugget by nugget and grain by golden grain, were sacking the hills of their bounty.

Dave Warner knew it and so did his partner, Bill Carlin. In their sod-roofed cabin on Alder Creek they were discussing the matter, while young Rube Rollins worked bear-grease into the leather of his boots and listened.

"Camp's on her last laigs," declared Warner through a beard that was black and thick. To emphasize his statement he shot a stream of tobacco-juice with expert aim from between his teeth at an itinerant fly on the floor.

"Creeks are gittin' gutted," contributed Carlin, who was short and heavy of stature and sported whiskers the color of a freshly cut carrot. "Reckon we may as well be movin' along. Thar's better ground farther south."

"Thinkin' of Owyhee?" asked young Rube. "Packer Jim claims that down to Fort Boise he heard tell they've found rock that'll go four dollars an ounce—on War Eagle Mountain."

"*Urrgh,* rock!" growled Warner. "What's the good of rock?"

"Placer for me every time," said Carlin. "Something you can pan out and spend the same night is my medicine. Placer—poor man's gold."

"There's placer gold, too, in Owyhee," said Rube. "Packer Jim says down yander in Jordan Creek they're takin' out nuggets the size o' hick'ry nuts."

"The boy's right," said Carlin. "I've heard tell of Owyhee gold."

"The Bannocks are up," said Warner. "Last news from the valley said they're raiding the ranches along the Snake. Aint got no wish to lose *my* ha'r!"

"There's three of us," pointed out young Rube. "We could make it through."

"We could," agreed Carlin. "Aint no pesky bunch of redskins can stop us. May as well pack the mule."

THEY told no one they were leaving Placerville—just slipped away as miners do when a gold-camp is dying. One or two men shouted, "Good luck," to them as, driving their pack-mule ahead of them, they left the camp; then the woods closed around them.

They rode in silence. With a long-barreled, single-shot rifle held across the saddle in front of him, each man watched the woods. Warner took the right-hand side of the trail, Carlin the left, and young Rube Rollins watched the pack-mule's ears. Thus did Idaho men ride in '63 when the Bannock Indians were "up."

An hour after leaving camp they reached Centreville, with its thousand inhabitants and sixteen saloons, in front of one of which the three drew rein.

Dismounting, they tied their horses to the hitching-rail and strode within. Three men playing poker at a table in the corner looked up.

"Howdy," said one.

"How's things over the hill?" asked another.

"Peterin' out," replied Warner. He set a booted heel on the footrail and flung a long, narrow buckskin sack on the bar.

"Set 'em up, Hank," he ordered the barkeeper, "and take it out of that."

They clinked their glasses together before they drank; they raised them in unison, tipped them up, swallowed. Then they set them down on the bar.

"Which way?" asked one of the men who had been playing poker.

"Owyhee," replied young Rube, his tongue loosened now by the fiery drink.

"You'll lose your ha'r," said the poker player. "The Bannocks are up."

"Not if we see 'em first," said Warner grimly.

He lifted the bottle from the bar and poured his glass half full.

"One more apiece, boys," he suggested. "Then we'll go."

The poker-players followed them to the door and watched them mount. Then they returned to their game.

AT sunset the three riders reached West Bannock—now Idaho City. From the creeks men in clay-stained clothing and muddy boots were beginning to pour into the saloons. The tinkling of the camp's only piano drifted through the open doors of a large frame building as they rode by, and from within a girl saw them and called to them with a laugh.

"May as well put up the hosses and make a night of it," suggested Warner.

"Why not?" asked Carlin.

"They're playing 'Susanna' in there," said young Rube, glancing over his shoulder and licking his lips.

They put up their horses at the nearest livery-stable, and left their rifles there too. Wearing .45 revolvers at their hips, they swaggered into a hotel.

"Room for three," said Warner, tossing a sack of dust on the desk.

"How's things down in the valley?" asked Carlin.

"Folks pouring in from back East, so I hear," replied the clerk. "Packer Jim claims there are five hundred people down to Fort Boise now, and there's another troop of cavalry been ordered down from Walla Walla."

"Indians making trouble?" asked Warner.

"The Bannocks are up," replied the clerk. "Been raiding the isolated ranches and raising all kinds of pertic'lar hell. Wiped out six prospectors that was headed for Owyhee and took their ha'r."

"There's where we are going," said young Rube.

"Better not try it, boy," advised the clerk. "There's gold in the creeks here yet; aint nothing the matter with West Bannock."

"We'll get through," asserted Warner. "Aint no Indians can stop us."

"Yes, we're goin' on, come morning," said Carlin determinedly. "Thar's better ground farther South."

OUT of the hotel they strode and up the street to the nearest saloon; when they left it an hour later they were slightly unsteady in their gait, and young Rube was singing: *"Don't you cry, Susanna—"*

"Shut up," said Warner, "and carry your likker like a man!"

Arms linked, they teetered up the street toward the sound of the piano; with arms linked they stopped in front of a dance-hall. Through wide-spread doors they saw bearded, roughly garbed men like themselves swinging their partners to music pounded from the yellow keys of a piano by a pasty-faced youth with a cigarette between his lips.

"Want to go in?" asked Warner.

"Might as well," said Carlin.

Young Rube said nothing, but he slipped his arm out of Warner's, for a girl had seen him standing near the door, and was coming toward him.

"Don't that beat all?" said Warner.

"We're gittin' old," said Carlin. "Let's go get a drink!" And arm in arm they staggered back up the street toward the nearest saloon.

Young Rube returned to the hotel along toward dawn to find Warner lying across the bed, and Carlin half under it with only one boot on. With his toe young Rube prodded Carlin in the ribs.

It was still early as with tempers frayed by their night's debauch, the older men rode out of West Bannock in silence. But young Rube was singing: *"Oh, don't you cry, Susanna—"*

"Shut up!" growled Warner.

Men working up to their thighs in the silty water of More's Creek shouted greeting to the three as they rode past. A pack-train driver stopped for a moment to chat, while he let his loaded mules wander leisurely on.

"Better not try to cross the desert, boys. The Bannocks are up."

"We're going through," Warner replied. "Thar's better ground farther south."

They drew to one side of the road to let a six-mule freighter pass. From his high seat the man called down:

"Keep your eyes peeled from here down, boys! The Bannocks are up."

THEY passed out of the timbered country into the lower hills which descended to meet the Boise Valley; sun-scorched, dead-grass hills with blue rock ribs showing through mottled patches of poison ivy. Here and there in the bottom of the cañon the white blossoms of syringa gleamed like snow left over from the winter's crop; here and there willows shot slender green spears from the edge of the creek. Higher up on the cañon sides chokecherry bushes flaunted their pendant creamy blossoms.

"Aint no danger of Indians in here now," said Warner.

"Nary an Indian," agreed Carlin. "Chokecherries aint ripe."

A bee droned past on heavy wing; over the granite boulders the heat waves shimmered, and a rattlesnake slithered across the road leaving a wavy trail in the dust. The cañon walls began to close in and from each side a talus of slide rock reached to the edge of the deeply rutted road. Young Rube thought he saw something move on the cañon rim. He raised his rifle.

A flight of arrows hissed from the rocks and a solitary smooth-bore musket boomed. Carlin groaned as a pointed barb drove through his face from cheek to cheek. The pack-mule screamed and dashed away, an arrow sticking upright in its rump.

"Ambushed, by hell!" said Warner coolly. "Git cover if you aim to save your ha'r!"

They were off their horses before he ceased speaking. Carlin broke off the shaft of the arrow and drew it out of his cheeks as he ran. Blood streamed from his mutilated face.

ANOTHER flight of arrows sang through the air above their heads as they dragged their horses behind granite boulders. Then silence.

"The red devils are up on the rim," said Warner.

Young Rube raised his rifle and rested an elbow on the rock behind which he crouched. His heart was pounding. With keen blue eyes he watched the cañon rim.

Thirty minutes passed during which the only sound was an occasional sputtered oath from Carlin as he spat out the blood which filled his mouth. There was no sign of life among the rocks.

Then young Rube saw a hand and part of a shoulder appear over the cañon rim two hundred feet above. Behind the hand he caught a glimpse of a face painted hideously in yellow and red.

Rube's rifle roared, and a body naked to the waist pitched over the rim of the cañon, rolled down among the rocks and came to a stop in the dusty road.

"My first Indian," said young Rube, as he shoved another cartridge into the chamber of his rifle.

From down the road came the jingle of military accouterments and the sound of horses trotting.

"We're all right now," said Warner.

The savage's death-cry was only a gurgle as he slumped to the ground.

"Guess I'll go get that buck's ha'r." Whipping a bowie knife from his boot he strode toward the Indian young Rube had shot. For a moment he bent over the body; when he straightened up he held a long black tuft of hair in one hand, and was wiping his blade on the leg of his boot.

"Bannock," he said, as he offered young Rube the scalp. "You got him 'tween the eyes."

"Keep it," said young Rube with a shudder. "I'm not collectin' ha'r."

Around a bend in the road ten blue-uniformed troopers, wearing yellow-banded campaign hats, rode at a jingling trot behind a curly-mustached young officer, wearing the silver bars of a first lieutenant.

"You spoiled a good fight," said Warner as the troopers halted at a sharp command. "Things was just gittin' interesting."

The soldiers stared at the body of the buck young Rube had shot, but their officer seemed not to see it. He was looking with interest at Carlin, whose face was a mask of blood and whose beard was a terrible sight.

"You're hurt," said the lieutenant. "Can you get through to the fort, or shall I send a couple of men with you?"

"I can make it," growled Carlin thickly. " 'Taint nothing but a scratch."

Young Rube fingered his rifle, watched the cañon rim and wished the soldiers would ride on.

"There are about fifteen Indians in that gang," said the lieutenant. "They raided and burned the Hawkins ranch, killed Hawkins and his wife and carried off the daughter."

"The hell!" muttered Carlin through his blood-clotted beard.

"You wont get 'em by going this way," said Warner. "Chances are they were crossing the foothills with the idea of joining up with the main outfit somewhere down on the Snake. Being up on the rim they'll be ten mile away before you get your horses out of the cañon."

"There's something to that," admitted the officer. "But my orders are to patrol this road and protect the pack-trains going into the mining camps of the Boise Basin. Another detail of troops will head the Indians off if they try to cross the valley."

A shadow drifted across the road as a buzzard floated past and the officer turned to his men.

"Two of you dismount and throw that carrion among the rocks," he said. "Don't trouble to bury it."

"Seen anything of a mule with an arrer stickin' in his rump?" asked Warner.

"You'll find him tied to a bush half a mile down the road," replied the officer. "We removed the arrow."

"Red tape," muttered Warner as the troopers rode on, "—yards and yards of it! Thank Gawd I aint a soldier!"

Through the waning afternoon they spoke little, and slowly the cañon unwound its length, until at last it came to an end where Fort Boise squatted at the foot of the hills. In the still, hot air the flag drooped listlessly around its slender pole.

As the sun sank into a sea of blood-red cloud, they saw the flag run down; from the fort at the foot of the hills came the boom of the sunset gun.

IN the single street of the newborn frontier town which ran parallel with the Boise River, covered wagons were standing; from every corral came the lowing of oxen quartered for the night. In front of the saloons hitched horses stood with drooping heads; from within sounded the voices of wrangling men. Now and again an officer from the fort rode past. Sometimes his lady was riding at his side. Erect in her side-saddle, on a beautifully groomed horse, she gazed straight ahead of her with haughty indifference, her cameo face framed beneath a ridiculously small and brightly beribboned hat, her waist constricted by whalebone stays to one-half its natural size, her feet completely out of sight beneath the hem of her riding habit.

The three rode down the long dusty street between the false-fronted stores. White dust rose from their horses' hoofs; chickens scuttled out of their path; sometimes a lean dog crossed the road.

"A hell of a place to live," said Warner. "Give me the mountains for mine. Gawd, aint it hot!"

"There's a sign, Bill," said young Rube suddenly, "a doctor's sign. Better go have him fix your wound."

"Aint but a scratch," mumbled Carlin. "Be all right when I've washed it out."

AT dawn they forded the Boise River without a backward glance at the town. Carlin was feeling better, for the bleeding in his face had ceased; he had plugged the arrow-wounds with leaf tobacco.

The town and river disappeared into a blue haze which crept up behind the riders; and the road became but a pair of wagon ruts between which lay the tracks of oxen; then the ruts turned toward the west.

"Emigrant headed for the Oregon country, I reckon," said Warner. "We'll have to go thar some day. Head off that fool mule-critter, Rube. He aims to go farther West too."

Southward they pressed across a blue sage plain over which hung a blue haze.

"Yander are the Owyhees," said Carlin suddenly. "Thar's still snow on War Eagle Mountain."

Beyond the blue plain, above a bank of cloud a white peak for an instant appeared, vanishing as the clouds closed in.

"It's eighty miles to Owyhee," observed Warner. "Ruther more than less."

"We'd ought to get thar in three days," said Carlin.

"Git along, mule!" shouted young Rube, gazing steadily toward the south.

With the scent of the sage in their nostrils they pressed onward through a blue-gray sea, which, tenantless of human life, stretched toward the south. Big gray jackrabbits by the hundreds popped up and disappeared; pronghorned antelope dashed across the riders' path, white rumps shining against the gray sage. Now and again from a distant ridge a droop-tailed coyote watched them pass, then circled and fat behind them slunk stealthily along their tracks.

"We'd ought to get one of them pronghorns," said Warner. "We're about out of meat."

"Better not go to shootin' promisc'us," advised Carlin. "The Bannocks are up."

THEY made camp that night among the rocks of an arroyo which held enough water for their horses; later they picketed the animals among the scant desert bunchgrass. They built no fire, but chewed on strips of jerky taken from the mule's pack.

"'Taint likely there are any Indians around," said Warner, "but I'll sorta keep a lookout while you two sleep."

He roused young Rube at midnight and the boy took his rifle and clambered up the rim. Sitting on a gray lava boulder with his rifle across his knees, he watched the desert and the moon, and listened to the wind amongst the sage.

Against the distant skyline, clear-cut against the moon, a horseman appeared. Young Rube dropped behind his rock, laid his rifle across it and watched fourteen Indian warriors pass in single file toward the south. The last man was leading a riderless animal which seemed to be carry-

Her blue eyes wide, she stared at the young frontiersman. "It's you!" she cried. "Oh, Rube!"

ing a pack. One by one they disappeared beyond the desert's rim.

Young Rube stole down into the arroyo and shook Warner's shoulder.

"Bannocks," he whispered. "Fourteen of 'em, headed toward the Snake."

They awakened Carlin and the three talked the matter over as the moon sailed into pearly dawn.

"Must be that gang that ambushed us," said Warner. "Chances are they are aimin' to join up with the main outfit down the river."

"The last man was leading a horse that seemed to be packed," said young Rube. "I was wonderin'—"

"You was wonderin'," said Carlin, "if it was the Hawkins gal."

"I knowed Hawkins and his wife back in Kansas," said Warner. "If those red devils have got his gal with 'em we'd ought to do something about it. Pretty as a picter she was, with blue eyes and red-gold ha'r—must be about twenty now; ruther more than less."

"What was her name?" asked young Rube, rubbing a finger up and down the barrel of the rifle across his knees.

"Same as her ma's," replied Warner. "The gal's name was Sue."

"Guess I'll go pack the mule," said young Rube. "It's nigh morning."

He strode away, a tall, lean figure against the dawn; softly beneath his breath, his partners heard him humming: *"Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me!"*

"Where's the boy from, Dave?" asked Carlin.

"He aint never said," replied Warner, "and I aint never asked him. Picked him up on the North Platte just before I met you."

"Guess we'd better lead the mule today," said Carlin. "No telling where he'll run to if we turn him loose."

They picked up the trail of the raiders, and dismounting, examined the tracks of the unshod Indian ponies. Caught on a bunch of sage, young Rube found a strip torn from a blue cotton dress. As it passed from hand to leathery hand, they looked at one another; then all gazed toward the south where the green Snake slid between its broken mesas and tumbled buttes.

"We'd ought to catch up with 'em by nightfall," said Warner.

"They'll be among the willows and arrer-weed this side of the river," said Carlin. "And thar will be one buck on guard on higher ground."

"That'll be my job," said young Rube as he tucked in his pocket the strip of blue cotton he had found.

Silently they rode on, their rifles resting across their saddles.

SUNSET found them nearing the rim of a broken mesa which reared itself five hundred feet above the Snake.

"Guess we'll picket the horses here," said Warner, "and wait for night."

Squatted among the jumbled gray lava fragments, they chewed on jerky while around them the shadows crept.

Suddenly young Rube raised his hand.

"What's that?" he asked.

From behind a knoll a half-mile away a puff of white smoke arose, hung in the still air for a moment and slowly dissipated. It was followed by two more.

"Smoke signals," replied Warner. "That raiding party is notifying the main outfit that they are back."

"The guard will be near that signal fire," said young Rube, whetting his bowie knife on the leg of his boot. "When it gets a little darker I'll go 'tend to him."

"Carlin and me will sneak down the cañon and tackle the rest," said Warner.

"Thar will be thirteen of 'em," said Carlin; "an unlucky number—"

"—for them," finished his partner.

Darkness settled down on the desert; in the cañon the owls began to hoot.

Young Rube arose to his feet. In the crook of his left arm his rifle rested lightly; a revolver swung at his right hip; his unsheathed knife he thrust into the leg of his boot.

"Wait a minute, boy," said Warner. "Let's go locate their camp before we do anything rash."

Belly-down, the three crawled to the edge of the mesa rim and gazed into the cañon below. Presently they saw a faint glow among the willows which fringed the Snake.

"They are thar, all right," said Carlin. "One of us will come in on 'em from the north, one from the south, and—"

"Don't tackle 'em until you hear an owl hoot," said young Rube. "That'll mean that I've taken care of the guard and that I'm in the willows on the east side of yander fire."

"If you make any mistake it'll cost you your life—and maybe ours," said Warner.

"There wont be any mistake," promised the youth grimly as he crawled away.

Belly-down like a gray snake, young Rube crawled from sage-brush to sage-brush, his right hand gripping his rifle by the middle, his left hand exploring each foot of the way, lest clink of steel rifle-barrel against stone might give warning of his presence.

Once something cold slipped across the back of his left hand. A second later he heard a rustle like the rubbing together of dry leaves.

"Rattler," he muttered, and icy fingers seemed suddenly to touch his spine. But the snake let him pass, and the boy crawled on.

A yellow glow appeared in the east as the moon began to rise; soon young Rube could see the rocks which littered the side of the butte where he had seen the smoke signals. Against one of the larger boulders he leaned his rifle; then, the blade of his knife between his teeth, he crawled slowly from lava slab to rounded niggerhead, keeping always in the shadow.

Suddenly he saw the Indian guard.

Motionless as a statue he sat on a rock, the yellow light of the moon full on his bronzed shoulders, turned toward young Rube—a fine pair of shoulders, thought the boy, to feel the kiss of a steel blade.

But now that he was in plain sight of his quarry, young Rube felt a disinclination to kill in cold blood. That he could do it he knew well, for the warrior did not know he was anywhere around.

But the man must die. Yes, the lives of Warner and Carlin depended on young Rube—the Indian must die.

Young Rube took the knife from his teeth with his right hand and kept on crawling—slowly, slowly, until he was within striking distance. Then he arose to his feet; the moon struck a silver spark from the steel in his raised right hand.

"Sssst!" hissed young Rube. *"Sssst!"*

AS though struck by a rattlesnake, the buck sprang high, turning in the air as he leaped. Barred with transverse stripes of red and yellow ochre, the face of the savage wore a ludicrous expression of surprise, which faded as he snatched his knife from his girdle.

"Ugh!" he grunted, and drove his blade at young Rube's heart.

But with his left hand young Rube caught the buck's right wrist, and with tremendous strength drew him forward; then the bowie in young Rube's right hand went to rest between the savage's ribs, and his death-cry was only a gurgle as he slumped to the ground.

"It was you or me," whispered young Rube, as he wiped his knife with a wisp of desert grass.

Erect in the moonlight he stood for a moment looking down at the body of his second Indian; then he turned back in search of his rifle.

Down the side of the mesa he made his way, eyes watching the glow of the raiders' campfire, dimly visible among the willows and arrow-weeds which jungled the shores of the Snake.

He gained the bottom of the cañon, dropped to his stomach and crawled a hundred yards. Then the trembling of the willows above him showed that he was going toward the raiders' camp.

A shadow floated above the trembling willows as there passed one of the great horned owls which dwelt among the broken mesas of the Snake River cañon. Puzzled at the motion of the willows, the big bird alighted on the top of a dead cottonwood snag. With round yellow eyes he watched the willows tremble; then from his swelled throat his hunting-call boomed through the silent night.

"Hoo, hoo—to-whit, to-whoo!"

"Good God!" cried young Rube.

The roar of two rifles came from somewhere in that tangle of brush. It was followed by an Indian yell and the *crack, crack, crack* of revolvers.

On his feet in an instant, young Rube forced the bushes aside, stumbling, tripping; his heart in his mouth, he tore through the willows toward the Indian camp, and rifle in hand, dashed into a small clearing that seemed literally filled with savages. With tomahawk raised a squat warrior rushed him, but the big rifle roared and the Indian fell, minus the top of his head. Two others charged young Rube; reversing ends with his rifle, he crushed their skulls with sweeping blows of the steel-shod butt. Then he cast aside his rifle and his revolver cracked, once, twice—six times. . . . . Then the Bannocks were gone and only the crackling of the brush advertised which way they had fled.

But they were not all gone, for on the ground lay ten bodies, naked torsos shining with grease, paint-barred visages turned upward to the moon, or buried in the dry silt left by the overflow of the Snake.

Among them lay the bodies of Warner and Carlin—their scalps gone.

"Good God!" exclaimed young Rube. "Damn that owl!"

Then suddenly he turned and listened, as a cry came from the willows.

Reloading his revolver, he cautiously made his way toward the cottonwood snag upon which the big owl had perched. Bound to it with rawhide strips was a girl in a blue cotton dress.

Her blue eyes wide, she stared at the tall young frontiersman as he stopped before her; over her shoulders her fair hair rippled, a cascade of gold beneath a silver moon.

"It's you!" she cried. "Oh, Rube!"

In a moment he had slashed her free, and she was crying on his shoulder while with gentle hand he stroked her hair.

"I 'lowed I'd find you when your folks took you West to get you away from me," he said. "Oh, Susanna!"

DAWN warned them that they could not linger. So, on the banks of the Snake, they buried Warner and Carlin, and Sue Hawkins spoke a few words above their graves.

"We'll go into Owyhee and I'll marry you thar," said young Rube. And she mounted a horse and alongside of him swam across the Snake.

Up an unknown creek they rode, stopping now and again to pluck Indian roses and blue mertensia from the slopes of the Owyhee Mountains. At night Rube kept guard while Sue slept.

At last they came to a big flat walled in on all sides by mighty hills, and in the creek which crossed it, young Rube saw red gravel.

"Got a notion to try out a pan," he said. "Looks good to me."

Sue Hawkins kneeled at his side and watched with bated breath as he whirled the pan of gravel in the creek. And she cried aloud with joy and surprise when at last she saw in the bottom of the pan a long string of gold.

"We found it," she cried, "just you and me! It's our discovery—*your* discovery, boy! And we'll name it Ruby City, after you."

And Ruby City it remains in the Owyhees today, after sixty-five years.

A FIGHTING MAN

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

The Story So Far:

JASON GRIDLEY of Tarzana had discovered the Gridley Wave, an advanced form of radio communication; and before he left on the expedition to that strange universe of Pellucidar in the hollow center of our earth, he had constructed a simple automatic device for broadcasting signals intermittently and for recording whatever might be received during his absence. So it happened that one day, entering my friend Gridley's deserted laboratory after a long absence, I saw with astonishment upon the ticker tape the dots and dashes which recorded a message in his code.

In brief, the message explained that for months mysterious signals had been received at Helium (Mars), and while they were unable to interpret them, they felt that they came from the planet Earth.

Repeated attempts to transmit answering signals to Earth proved fruitless; then the best minds of Helium began the task of analyzing and reproducing the Gridley Wave. They felt that at last they had succeeded, and they were eagerly awaiting an acknowledgment.

I have since been in almost constant communication with Mars, but out of loyalty to Jason Gridley, to whom all the credit and honor are due, I have made no official announcement; nor shall I give out any important information, leaving all that for his return to the outer world; but I believe I am betraying no confidence if I narrate the interesting story of Hadron of Hastor, which he told to me recently.

It seems best to let Hadron of Hastor,—the young Martian nobleman who is the hero of this story—give it in his own words. But first let me tell you a little about Mars and about the difficult predicament Hadron got himself into. The dominant race in whose hands rest the progress and civilization—yes, the very life—of Mars differ but little in physical appearance from ourselves. The fact that their skins are a light reddish copper color and that they are oviparous constitute the two most marked divergences

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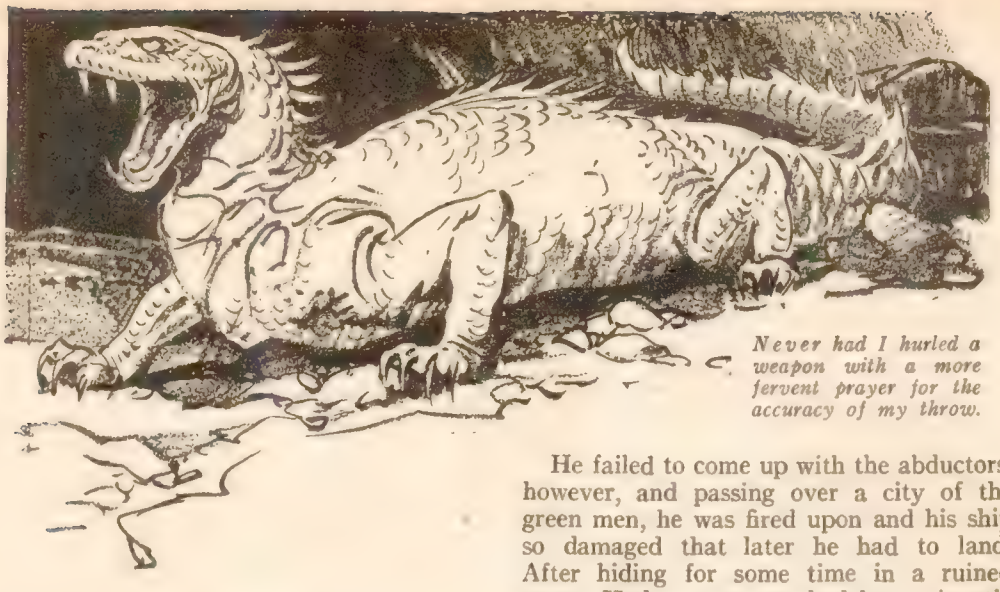


Never had I hurled a weapon with a more fervent prayer for the accuracy of my throw.

A splendid achievement of real creative imagination here takes you far from commonplace things to share in a tremendous adventure on another inhabited planet.

OF MARS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

from Anglo-Saxon standards. No, there is another—their longevity. A thousand years is the natural span of life of a Martian, although because of their warlike activities and the prevalence of assassination among them, few live their allotted span.

Scattered over all the arid waste lands of the dead sea bottoms, often inhabiting the ruined cities of another age, are the feared green hordes of Mars. These terrible warriors of Barsoom are the hereditary enemies of all the other races of this martial planet.

The military forces of the red men are highly organized, the principal arm of the service being the air navy, an enormous air force of battleships, cruisers and an infinite variety of lesser craft down to one-man scout flyers.

It was, indeed, aboard one of these one-man flyers that Hadron embarked on his great adventure. For Hadron had fallen in love with Sanoma Tora, lovely daughter of a Martian dignitary, and when she was abducted by the crew of a mysterious foreign airship, Hadron impetuously leaped aboard the first craft handy and set out in pursuit.

He failed to come up with the abductors, however, and passing over a city of the green men, he was fired upon and his ship so damaged that later he had to land. After hiding for some time in a ruined tower, Hadron was attacked by a gigantic white ape. He won that combat, however. And shortly thereafter he was enabled to rescue Tavia, a girl of his own race, who had been abducted in childhood from her native city of Tjanath by the people of Jahar; and recently attempting to escape had been made captive by the green men.

Mounted on one of their gigantic thoats, with Tavia clinging behind him, Hadron galloped out into the weird Martian night.

Guided by Tavia, they presently reached the grove where Tavia had concealed her flyer shortly before her capture; and embarking therein, they set out through the air for Tavia's native city of Tjanath. This place they reached in safety, but they were ill received; for Tavia's flyer was of a pattern which identified it as coming from the enemy city of Jahar. The people of Tjanath refused to believe either Tavia's story or Hadron's, and Hadron was cast into a dungeon. There he won the friendship of Nur An, a fellow-prisoner from Jahar, and together they contrived to kill their guards and make their way to the upper rooms of the great palace. There they found Nur An's sweetheart Phao and later Tavia, but the alarm had been sounded; and now Hadron finds himself with Phao and Tavia groping along a dark corridor, while Yo Seno, the keeper of the keys, leads the soldiers of the guard in search of them. *(Hadron himself here takes up the story:)*

WITH Phao in the lead and Tavia between us, we traversed the dark corridor back toward the apartment of Yo

Seno. When we reached the panel marking the end of our journey, Phao halted, and together we listened intently for any sound that might evidence the presence of an occupant in the room beyond. All was silent as the tomb.

"I believe," said Phao, "that it will be safer if you and Tavia remain here until night. I shall return to my apartment and go about my duties in the usual manner and after the palace has quieted down, these levels will be almost deserted; then I can come and get you with far less danger of detection than were I to take you to the apartment now."

We agreed that her plan was a good one, and bidding us a temporary farewell, she opened the panel sufficiently to permit her to survey the apartment beyond. It was quite empty. She stepped from the corridor, closing the panel behind her, and once again Tavia and I were plunged into utter darkness.

The long hours of our wait in the utter darkness of the corridor should have seemed interminable, but they did not. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible upon the floor, our backs against one of the walls; and leaning close together so that we might converse in low whispers, we found more entertainment than I should have guessed possible both in our conversation and in the long silences that broke it, so that it really did not seem a long time at all before the panel was swung open and we saw Phao in the subdued light of the apartment beyond. She motioned us to follow her, and in silence we obeyed. The corridor beyond the chamber of Yo Seno was deserted, as also was the ramp leading to the level below and the corridor upon which it opened. Fortune seemed to favor us at every step and there was a prayer of thanksgiving upon my lips as Phao pushed open the door leading into the apartment of the Prince and motioned us to enter.

BUT at the same instant my heart sank within me, for as I entered the apartment with Tavia, I saw warriors standing upon either side of the room awaiting us. With an exclamation of warning, I drew Tavia behind me and backed quickly toward the door, but as I did so I heard a rush of feet and the clank of accouterments in the corridor behind me and casting a quick glance over my shoulder I saw other warriors running from the doorway of an apartment upon the opposite side of the corridor.

We were surrounded. We were lost, and my first thought was that Phao had betrayed us, leading us into this trap from which there could be no escape. They hustled us back into the room and surrounded us and for the first time I saw Yo Seno. He stood there, a sneering grin upon his face, and but for the fact that Tavia had assured me that he had not harmed her I should have leaped upon him there, though a dozen swords had been at my vitals the next instant.

"So!" sneered Yo Seno. "You thought to fool me, did you? Well, I am not so easily fooled. I guessed the truth and I followed you through the corridor and overheard all your plans as you discussed them with the woman Tavia. We have you all now!"—and turning to one of the warriors, he motioned to the closet upon the opposite side of the chamber. "Fetch the other," he commanded.

The fellow crossed to the door, and opening it, revealed Nur An lying bound and gagged upon the floor.

"Cut his bonds and remove the gag," ordered Yo Seno. "It is too late now for him to thwart my plans by giving the others a warning."

NUR AN came toward us, with a firm step, his head high and a glance of haughty contempt for our captors.

The four of us stood facing Yo Seno, the sneer upon whose face had been replaced by a glare of hatred.

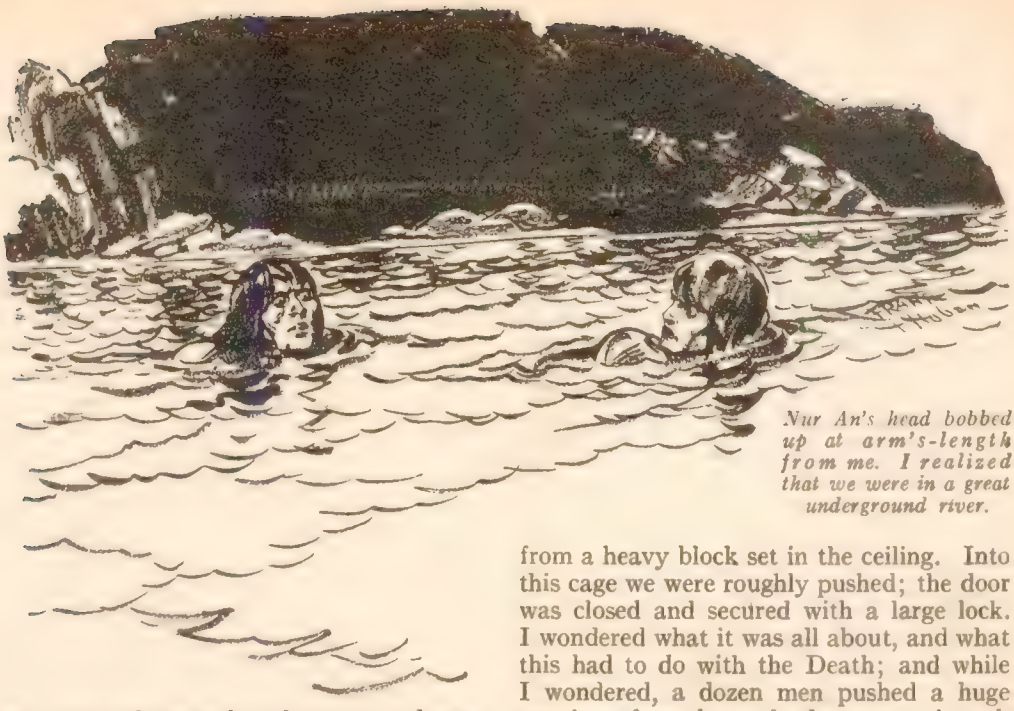
"You have been sentenced to die the Death," he said. "It is the death for spies. No more terrible punishment can be inflicted. Could there be, it would be meted to you two." He looked first at me and then at Nur An, and added: "That you might suffer more for the murder of our two comrades."

So they had found the warriors we had dispatched. Well, what of it? Evidently it had not rendered our position any worse than it had been before. We were to die the Death and that was the worst that they could accord us.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded Yo Seno.

"We still live!" I exclaimed, and laughed in his face.

"Before long you will be beseeching your first ancestors for death," hissed the keeper of the keys, "but you will not have death



Nur An's head bobbed up at arm's-length from me. I realized that we were in a great underground river.

too soon and remember that no one knows how long it takes to die the Death. We cannot add to your physical suffering, but for the torment of your mind let me remind you that we are sending you to the Death without letting you know what the fate of your accomplices will be." And he nodded toward Tavia and Phao.

That was a nice point, well chosen. He could not have hit upon any means more certain of inflicting acute torture upon me than this, but I would not give him the satisfaction of witnessing my true emotion and so, once again, I laughed in his face. His patience had about reached the limit of its endurance, for he turned abruptly to a padwar of the guard and ordered him to remove us at once.

As we were hustled from the room, Nur An called a brave good-by to Phao.

"Good-by, Tavia!" I cried; "and remember that we still live."

"We still live, Hadron of Hastor!" she called back. "We still live!" And then she was swept from my view as we were pushed along down the corridor.

Down ramp after ramp we were conducted to the uttermost depths of the palace pits and then into a great chamber where I saw Haj Osis sitting upon a throne, surrounded again by his chiefs and his courtiers as he had been upon the occasion that he had interviewed me. Opposite the jed, and in the middle of the chamber, hung a great iron cage suspended from a heavy block set in the ceiling. Into this cage we were roughly pushed; the door was closed and secured with a large lock. I wondered what it was all about, and what this had to do with the Death; and while I wondered, a dozen men pushed a huge trapdoor from beneath the cage. A rush of cold, clammy air enveloped us, and I experienced a chill that seemed to enter my marrow, as though I lay in the cold arms of death. Hollow moans and groans came faintly to my ears, and I knew we were above the pits where the Death lay.

No word was spoken within the chamber, but at a signal from Haj Osis strong men lowered the cage slowly into the aperture beneath us. Here the cold and the damp were more obvious and penetrating than before, while the ghastly sounds appeared to redouble in volume.

Down, down we slid into an abyss of darkness. The horror of the silence in the chamber above was forgotten in the horror of the pandemonium of uncanny sounds that rose from beneath.

How far we were lowered thus I may not even guess, but to Nur An it seemed at least a thousand feet, and then we commenced to detect a slight luminosity about us. The moaning and the groaning had become a constant roar, but which, as we approached it, seemed less like moans and groans and more like the sound of wind and rushing waters.

SUDDENLY, without the slightest warning, the bottom of the cage, which evidently must have been hinged upon one side, and held by a catch that could be sprung from above, swung downward. It happened so quickly that we hardly had

time for conjecture before we were plunged into rushing water.

As I rose to the surface, I discovered that I could see. Wherever we were, it was not shrouded in impenetrable darkness, but was lighted dimly.

Almost immediately Nur An's head bobbed up at arm's-length from me. A strong current was bearing us onward and I realized at once that we were in the grip of a great underground river, one of those to which the remaining waters of dying Barsoom have receded. In the distance I descried a shoreline dimly visible in the subdued light, and shouting to Nur An to follow me, I struck out toward it. The water was cold, but not sufficiently so to alarm me and I had no doubt but that we would reach the shore.

By the time that we had attained our goal and crawled out upon the rocky shore, our eyes had become accustomed to the dim light of the interior and now, with astonishment, we gazed about us. What a vast cavern! Far, far above us its ceiling was discernible in the light of the minute radium particles with which the rock that formed its walls and ceiling were impregnated, but the opposite bank of the rushing torrent was beyond the range of our vision.

"So this is the Death!" exclaimed Nur An.

"I doubt if they know what it is themselves," I replied. "From the roaring of the river and the moaning of the wind, they have conjured something horrible in their own imaginations."

"Perhaps the greatest suffering that the victim must endure lies in his anticipation of what awaits him in these seemingly horrid depths," suggested Nur An; "whereas the worst that realization might bring would be death by drowning."

"Or by starvation," I suggested.

NUR AN nodded. "Nevertheless," he said, "I wish I might return, just long enough to mock them and witness their disappointment when they find that the Death is not so horrible after all!

"What a mighty river," he added after a moment's silence. "Could it be a tributary of Iss?"

"Perhaps it is Iss herself," I said.

"Then we are bound upon the last long pilgrimage down to the lost sea of Korus in the valley Dor," said Nur An gloomily. "It may be a lovely place, but I do not wish to go there yet."

"It is a place of horror," I replied.

"Hush," he cautioned; "that is sacrilege."

"It is sacrilege no longer since John Carter and Tars Tarkas snatched the veil of secrecy from the valley Dor and disposed of the myth of Issus, Goddess of Life Eternal."

Even after I had told him the whole tragic story of the false gods of Mars, Nur An remained skeptical, so closely are the superstitions of religion woven into every fiber of our being.

WE were both a trifle fatigued after our battle with the strong current of the river, and perhaps, too, we were suffering from reaction from the nervous shock of the ordeal through which we had passed, and so we remained there, resting upon the rocky shore of the river of mystery. Eventually our conversation turned to what was uppermost in the minds of both and yet which each hesitated to mention—the fate of Tavia and Phao.

"I wish that they too had been sentenced to the Death," I said, "for then at least we might be with them and protect them."

"I am afraid that we shall never see them again," said Nur An gloomily. "What a cruel fate that I should have found Phao, only to lose her again so quickly and so irretrievably!"

"It is indeed a strange trick of fate that after Tul Axtar stole her from you, he should have lost her too, and then that you should find her in Tjanath."

He looked at me with a slightly puzzled expression for a moment and then his face cleared.

"Phao is not the woman of whom I told you in the dungeon at Tjanath," he said. "Phao I loved long before; she was my first love. After I lost her I thought that I never could care for a woman again, but this other one came into my life and, knowing that Phao was gone forever, I found some consolation in my new love, but I realize now that it was not the same, that no love could ever displace that which I felt for Phao."

"You lost her irretrievably once before," I reminded him, "but you found her again; perhaps you will find her once more."

"I wish that I might share your optimism," he said.

"We have little else to buoy us up," I reminded him.

"You are right," he said, and then with a laugh, added, "we still live!"

PRESENTLY, feeling rested, we set out along the shore in the direction that the river ran, for we had decided that that would be our course if for no other reason than that it would be easier going downhill than up. Where it would lead, we had not the slightest idea: perhaps to Korus; perhaps to Omean, the buried sea where lay the ships of the First Born.

Over tumbled rock masses we clambered and along level stretches of smooth gravel we pursued our rather aimless course, knowing not whither we were going, having no goal toward which to strive. There was some vegetation, weird and grotesque, but almost colorless for want of sunlight. There were tree-like plants with strange, angular branches that snapped off at the lightest touch and as the trees did not look like trees, there were blossoms that did not look like flowers. It was a world as unlike the outer world as the figments of imagination are unlike realities.

But whatever musing upon the flora of this strange land I may have been indulging in was brought to a sudden termination as we rounded the shoulder of a jutting promontory and came face to face with as hideous a creature as ever I have laid my eyes upon. It was a great white lizard with gaping jaws large enough to engulf a man at a single swallow. At sight of us it emitted an angry hiss and advanced menacingly toward us.

Being unarmed and absolutely at the mercy of any creature that attacked us, we pursued the only plan that our intelligence could dictate: we retreated—and I am not ashamed to admit that we retreated rapidly.

Running quickly around the end of the promontory, we turned sharply up the bank away from the river. The bottom of the cavern rose sharply, and as I clambered upward I glanced behind me occasionally to note the actions of our pursuer. He was now in plain sight, having followed us around the end of the promontory and there he stood looking about as though in search of us. Though we were not far from him, he did not seem to see us, and I soon became convinced that his eyesight was faulty; but not wishing to depend upon this I kept on climbing until presently we came to the top of the promontory, and looking down upon the other side, I saw a considerable stretch of smooth gravel, stretching out into the dim distance along the river shore. If we could clamber down the opposite side of the barrier and reach this level stretch of gravel, I felt that we might escape the attentions of the huge monster. A final glance at him showed him still standing, peering first in one direction and then in another as though in search of us.

Nur An had followed close behind me, and now together we slipped over the edge of the escarpment, and though the rough rocks scratched us severely, we finally reached the gravel below; whereupon, having eluded our menacer, we set out upon a brisk run down the river. We had covered scarcely more than fifty paces when Nur An stumbled over an obstacle and as I stopped to give him a hand up, I saw that the thing which had tripped him was the rotting harness of a warrior, and a moment later I saw the hilt of a sword protruding from the gravel. Seizing it, I wrenched it from the ground. It was a good long sword and I may tell you that the feel of it in my hand did more to restore my self-confidence than aught else that might have transpired. Being made of non-corrosive metal, as are all Barsoomian weapons, it remained as sound today as the moment that it had been abandoned by its owner.

"Look," said Nur An, pointing, and there at a little distance we saw another harness and another sword. This time there were two, a long sword and a short sword, and these Nur An took. No longer did we run; I have always felt that there is little upon Barsoom that two well-armed warriors need run from.

AS we continued along our way across the level stretch of gravel we sought to solve the mystery of these abandoned weapons, a mystery that was still further heightened by our discovery of many more. In some cases the harness had rotted away entirely, leaving nothing but the metal parts, while in others it was comparatively sound and new. Presently we discerned a white mound ahead of us, but in the dim light of the cavern we could not at first determine of what it consisted. When we did, we were filled with horror, for the white mound was of the bones and skulls of human beings. Then, at last, I thought I had an explanation of the abandoned harness and weapons. This was the lair of the great lizard—here he took his toll of the unhappy creatures that passed down the river. But how was it that armed men

had come here? We had been cast into the cavern unarmed, as I was positive all of the condemned prisoners of Tjanath must have been. From whence came the others? I do not know; doubtless I shall never know. It was a mystery from the first. It will remain a mystery to the last.

As we passed on we found harness and weapons scattered all about, but there was infinitely more harness than weapons.

I had added a good short sword to my equipment as well as a dagger, as had also Nur An, and I was stooping to examine another weapon which we had found—a short sword with a beautifully ornamented hilt and guard—when Nur An suddenly voiced a cry of warning.

"On guard!" he exclaimed. "Hadron! It comes!"

LEAPING to my feet, I wheeled about, the short sword still in my hand, and there, bearing down upon us at considerable speed and with wide distended jaws, came the huge white lizard, hissing ominously. He was a hideous sight, a sight such as to make even a brave man turn and run, which I am now convinced is what practically all of his victims did; but here were two who did not run. Perhaps he was so close that we realized the futility of flight without giving the matter conscious thought, but be that as it may, we stood there—Nur An with his long sword in his hand, I with the ornately carved short sword that I had been examining, though instantly I realized that it was not the weapon with which to defend myself against this great hulking brute.

Yet I could not bear to waste a weapon already in my hand, especially in view of an accomplishment of mine in which I took considerable pride.

In Helium, both officers and men often wager large amounts upon the accuracy with which they can hurl daggers and short swords and I have seen considerable sums change hands within an hour. So proficient was I that I had added considerably to my pay through my winning until my fame had spread to such an extent that I could find no one willing to pit his skill against mine.

Never had I hurled a weapon with a more fervent prayer for the accuracy of my throw than now as I launched the short sword swiftly at the mouth of the oncoming lizard. It was not a good throw—it would have lost me money in Helium—but in this instance, I think, it saved my life. The sword, instead of speeding in a straight line, point first, as it should have, turned slowly upward until it was traveling at an angle of about forty-five degrees, with the point forward and downward. In this position the point struck just inside of the lower jaw of the creature, while the heavy hilt, carried forward by its own momentum, lodged in the roof of the monster's mouth.

INSTANTLY it was helpless; the point of the sword had passed through its tongue into the bony substance of its lower jaw, while the hilt was lodged in its upper jaw behind its mighty fangs. It could not dislodge the sword, either forward or backward. For an instant it halted in hissing dismay, and simultaneously Nur An and I leaped to opposite sides of its ghastly white body. It tried to defend itself with its tail and talons, but we were too quick for it and presently it was lying in a pool of its own purple blood in the final spasmodic muscular reaction of dissolution.

There was something peculiarly disgusting and loathsome about the purple blood of the creature, not only in its appearance but in its odor, which was almost nauseating, and Nur An and I lost no time in quitting the scene of our victory. At the river we washed our blades and then continued on upon our fruitless quest.

As we had washed our blades we had noticed fish in the river and after we had put sufficient distance between the lair of the lizard and ourselves, we determined to bend our energies for awhile toward filling our larder and our stomachs.

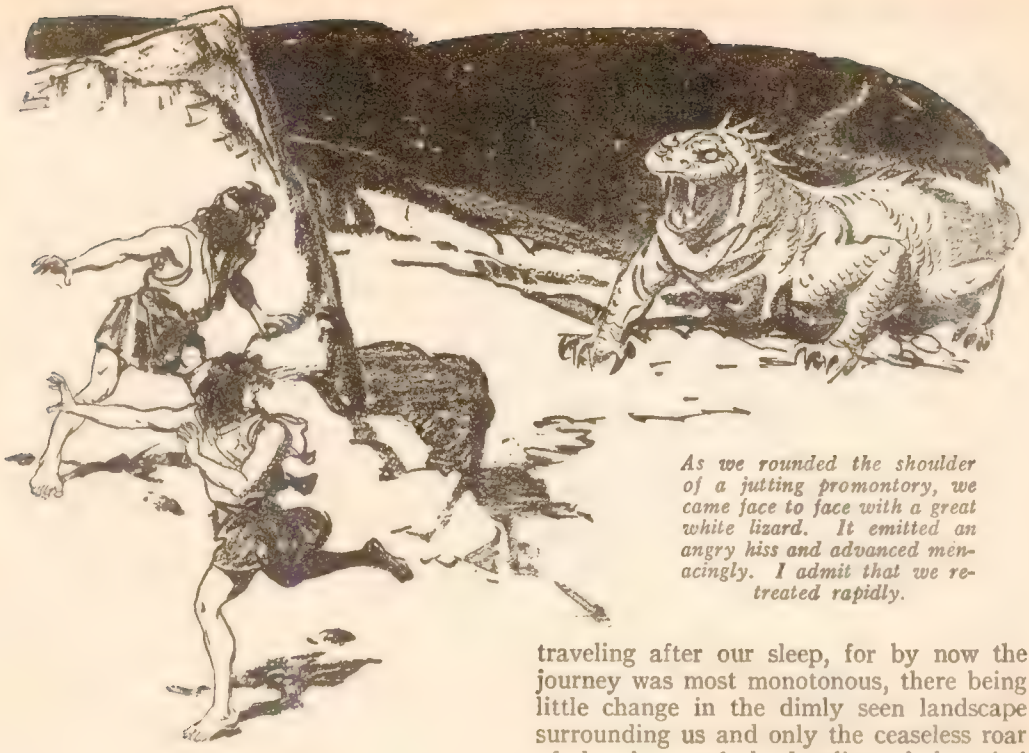
Neither one of us had ever caught a fish or eaten one, but we knew from history that they could be caught and that they were edible. Being swordsmen, we naturally looked to our swords as the best means for procuring our flesh and so we waded into the river with drawn long swords prepared to slaughter fish to our hearts' content, but wherever we went there was no fish. We could see them elsewhere, but not within reach of our swords.

"Perhaps," said Nur An, "fish are not such fools as they appear. They may see us approaching and question our motives."

"I can readily believe that you are right," I replied. "Suppose we try strategy."

"How?" he asked.

"Come with me," I said, "and return to the bank." After a little search downstream I found a rocky ledge overhanging



As we rounded the shoulder of a jutting promontory, we came face to face with a great white lizard. It emitted an angry hiss and advanced menacingly. I admit that we retreated rapidly.

the river. "We will lie here at intervals," I said, "with only our eyes and the points of our swords over the edge of the bank. We must not talk or move, lest we frighten the fish. Perhaps in this way we shall procure one,"—for I had long since given up the idea of a general slaughter.

To my gratification my plan worked and it was not long before we each had a large fish.

Naturally, like other men, we prefer our flesh cooked, but being warriors we were accustomed to it either way, and so we broke our long fast upon raw fish from the river of mystery.

Both Nur An and I felt greatly refreshed and strengthened by our meal, however unpalatable it might have been. It had been some time since we had slept and though we had no idea whether it was still night upon the outer surface of Barsoom, or whether dawn had already broken, we decided that it would be best for us to sleep and so Nur An stretched out where we were while I watched. After he awoke, I took my turn. I think that neither one of us slept more than a single zode, but the rest did us quite as much good as the food that we had eaten and I am sure that I have never felt more fit than I did when we set out again upon our goalless journey.

I do not know how long we had been traveling after our sleep, for by now the journey was most monotonous, there being little change in the dimly seen landscape surrounding us and only the ceaseless roar of the river and the howling of the wind to keep us company.

Nur An was the first to discern the change; he seized my arm and pointed ahead. I must have been walking with my eyes upon the ground in front of me, else I would simultaneously have seen what he saw.

"It is daylight," I exclaimed. "It is the sun."

"It can be nothing else," he said.

THERE, far ahead of us, lay a great archway of light. That was all that we could see from the point at which we discovered it, but now we hastened on almost at a run, so anxious were we for a solution, so hopeful that it was indeed the sunlight and that in some inexplicable and mysterious way the river had found its way to the surface of Barsoom. I knew that this could not be true and Nur An knew it, and yet each knew how great his disappointment would be when the true explanation of the phenomenon was revealed.

When we approached the great patch of light it became more and more evident that the river had broken from its dark cavern out into the light of day and when we reached the edge of that mighty portal we looked out upon a scene that filled our hearts with warmth and gladness, for there, stretching before us, lay a valley—a small

valley, it is true—a valley hemmed in, as far as we could see, by mighty cliffs, but yet a valley of life and fertility and beauty bathed in the hot light of the sun.

"It is not quite the surface of Barsoom," said Nur An, "but it is the next best thing."

"And there must be a way out," I said. "There must be. If there is not, we will make one."

"Right you are, Hadron of Hastor," he cried. "We will make a way. Come!"

Before us the banks of the roaring river were lined with lush vegetation; great trees raised their leafy branches far above the waters; brilliant, scarlet sward was lapped by the little wavelets and everywhere were blooming gorgeous flowers and shrubs of many hues and shapes. Here was a vegetation such as I had never seen before upon the surface of Barsoom. Here were forms similar to those with which I was familiar and others totally unknown to me, yet all were lovely, though some were bizarre.

EMERGING, as we had, from the dark and gloomy bowels of the earth, the scene before us presented a view of wondrous beauty and, while doubtless enhanced by contrast, it was nevertheless such an aspect as is seldom given to the eyes of a Barsoomian of today to view. To me it seemed a little garden spot upon a dying world preserved from an ancient era when Barsoom was young and meteorological conditions were such as to favor the growth of vegetation that has long since become extinct over practically the entire area of the planet. In this deep valley, surrounded by lofty cliffs, the atmosphere doubtless was considerably denser than upon the surface of the planet above. The sun's rays were reflected by the lofty escarpment, which must also hold the heat during the colder periods of night and, in addition to this, there was ample water for irrigation which nature might easily have achieved through percolation of the waters of the river through and beneath the top soil of the valley.

For several minutes Nur An and I stood spellbound by the bewitching view and then espying luscious fruit hanging in great clusters from some of the trees, and bushes loaded with berries, we subordinated the esthetic to the corporeal and set forth to supplement our meal of raw fish with the exquisite offerings which hung so temptingly before us.

As we started to move through the vegetation we became aware of thin threads of a gossamer-like substance festooned from tree to tree and bush to bush, so fine as to be almost invisible, yet they were so strong as to impede our progress. It was surprisingly difficult to break them and when there were a dozen or more at a time barring our way, we found it necessary to use our daggers to cut a way through them.

We had taken only a few steps into the deeper vegetation, cutting our way through the gossamer strands, when we were confronted by a new and surprising obstacle to our advance—a large, venomous-looking spider that scurried toward us in an inverted position, clinging with a dozen legs to one of the gossamer strands, which served both as its support and its pathway, and if its appearance was any index to its venomousness it must, indeed, have been a deadly insect.

As it came toward me,—apparently with the most sinister of intentions,—I hastily returned my dagger to its scabbard and drew my short sword, with which I struck at the fearsome-looking creature. As the blow descended, it drew back so that my point only slightly scratched it, whereupon it opened its hideous mouth and emitted a terrific scream so out of proportion to its size and to the nature of such insects with which I was familiar that it had a most appalling effect upon my nerves. Instantly the scream was answered by an unearthly chorus of similar cries all about us and immediately a swarm of these horrid insects came racing toward us upon their gossamer threads. Evidently this was the only position which they assumed in moving about and their webs the only means to that end, for their twelve legs grew upward from their backs, giving them a most uncanny appearance.

Fearing that the creatures might be poisonous, Nur An and I retreated hastily to the mouth of the cavern and as the spiders could not go beyond the ends of their threads, we were soon quite safe from them—but now the luscious fruit looked more tempting than ever, since it seemed to be denied to us.

"The road down the river is well guarded," said Nur An with a rueful smile, "which might indicate a most desirable goal."

"At present that fruit is the most desirable thing in the world to me," I replied, "and I am going to try to discover some means of obtaining it."

MOVING to the right, away from the river, I sought for an entrance into the forest that would be free from the threads of the spiders and presently I came to a point where there was a well defined trail about four or five feet wide, apparently cut by man from the vegetation. Across the mouth of it, however, were strung thousands of gossamer strands. To touch them, we knew, would be the signal for myriads of the angry spiders to swarm upon us. While our greatest fear was, of course, that the insects might be poisonous, their cruelly fanged mouths also suggested that, poisonous or not, they might in their great numbers constitute a real menace.

"Do you notice," I said to Nur An, "that these threads seem stretched across the entrance to the pathway only? Beyond them I cannot detect any, though of course they are so tenuous that they might defy one's vision even at a short distance."

"I do not see any spiders here," said Nur An. "Perhaps we can cut our way through with impunity at this point."

"We shall experiment," I said, drawing my long sword.

Advancing, I cut a few strands, when immediately there swarmed out of the trees and bushes upon either side great companies of the insects, each racing along its own individual strand. Where the strands were intact the creatures crossed and recrossed the trail, staring at us with their venomous, beady eyes, their powerful, gleaming fangs bared threateningly toward us.

The cut strands floated in the air until borne down by the weight of the approaching spiders, who followed to the severed ends but no farther. Here they either hung glaring at us or else clambered up and down excitedly, but not one of them ever ventured from his strand.

AS I watched them, their antics suggested a plan. "They are helpless when their web is severed," I said to Nur An. "Therefore if we cut all their webs they cannot reach us."

Whereupon, advancing, I swung my long sword above my head and cut downward through the remaining strands. Instantly the creatures set up their infernal screaming. Several of them, torn from their webs by the blow of my sword, lay upon the ground upon their bellies, their feet sticking straight up into the air. They seemed utterly helpless and though they screamed loudly and frantically waved their legs, they were clearly unable to move; nor could those hanging at either side of the trail reach us.

With my sword I destroyed those that lay in the path and then, followed by Nur An, I entered the forest. Ahead of us I could see no webs; the way seemed clear, but before we advanced farther into the forest I turned about to have a last look at the discomfited insects to see what they might be about. They had stopped screaming now and were slowly returning into the foliage, evidently to their lairs, and as they seemed to offer no further menace we continued upon our way. The trees and bushes along the pathway were innocent of fruit or berries, though just beyond reach we saw them growing in profusion, behind a barrier of those gossamer webs that we had so quickly learned to avoid.

"This trail appears to have been made by man," said Nur An.

"Whoever made it, or when," I said, "there is no doubt but that some creature still uses it. The absence of fruit along it would alone be ample proof of that."

WE moved cautiously along the winding trail, not knowing at what moment we might be confronted by some new menace in the form of man or beast. Presently we saw ahead of us what appeared to be an opening in the forest and a moment later we emerged into a clearing. Looming in front of us at a distance of perhaps less than a haad was a towering pile of masonry.

It was a gloomy pile, apparently built of black volcanic rock. For some thirty feet above the ground there was a blank wall, pierced by but a single opening—a small doorway almost directly in front of us. This part of the structure appeared to be a wall; beyond it rose buildings of weird and grotesque outlines and dominating all was a lofty tower, from the summit of which a wisp of smoke curled upward into the quiet air.

From this new vantage-point we had a better view of the valley than had at first been accorded us and now, more marked than ever, were the indications that it was the crater of some gigantic and long-extinct volcano. Between us and the buildings, which suggested a small walled city, the clearing contained a few scattered trees, but most of the ground was given over to cultivation, being traversed by irrigation ditches of an archaic type which has been aban-

doned upon the surface for many ages, having there been superseded by a system of sub-irrigation when the diminishing water supply necessitated the adoption of conservation measures.

Having satisfied myself that no further information could be gained by remaining where we were, I started boldly into the clearing toward the city. "Where are you going?" asked Nur An.

"I am going to find out who dwells in that gloomy place," I replied. "Here are fields and gardens, so they must have food and that, after all, is the only favor that I shall ask of them."

Nur An shook his head. "The very sight of the place depresses me," he said. But he came with me as I knew he would, for Nur An is a splendid companion upon whose loyalty one may always depend.

WE had traversed about two-thirds of the distance across the clearing toward the city before we saw any signs of life. Then a few figures appeared at the top of the wall above the entrance. They carried long, thin scarfs, which they seemed to be waving in greeting to us and when we had come yet closer I saw that they were young women. They leaned over the parapet and smiled and beckoned to us.

As we came within speaking distance below the wall, I halted.

"What city is this," I asked, "and who is jed here?"

"Enter, warriors," cried one of the girls, "and we will lead you to the jed." She was very pretty and she was smiling sweetly, as were her companions.

"This is not such a depressing place as you thought," I said in a low voice to Nur An.

"I was mistaken," said Nur An. "They seem to be a kindly, hospitable people. Shall we enter?"

"Come," called another of the girls; "behind these gloomy walls lie food and wine and love."

Food! I would have entered a far more forbidding place than this for food.

As Nur An and I strode toward the small door, it slowly withdrew to one side. Beyond, across a black paved avenue, rose buildings of black volcanic rock. The avenue seemed deserted as we stepped within. We heard the faint click of a lock as the door slid into place behind us and I had a sudden foreboding of ill that made my right hand seek the hilt of my long sword.

CHAPTER IX

The Spider of Ghasta

FOR a moment we stood undecided in the middle of the empty avenue looking about us, and then our attention was attracted to a narrow stairway running up the inside of the wall, upon the summit of which the girls had appeared and welcomed us.

Down the stairway the girls were coming. There were six of them. Their beautiful faces were radiant with happy smiles of welcome that instantly dispelled the gloom of the dark surroundings as the rising sun dissipates night's darkness and replaces her shadows with light and warmth and happiness.

Beautifully wrought harness, enriched by many a sparkling jewel, accentuated the loveliness of faultless figures. As they approached a vision of Tavia sprang to my mind. Beautiful as these girls unquestionably were, how much more beautiful was Tavia!

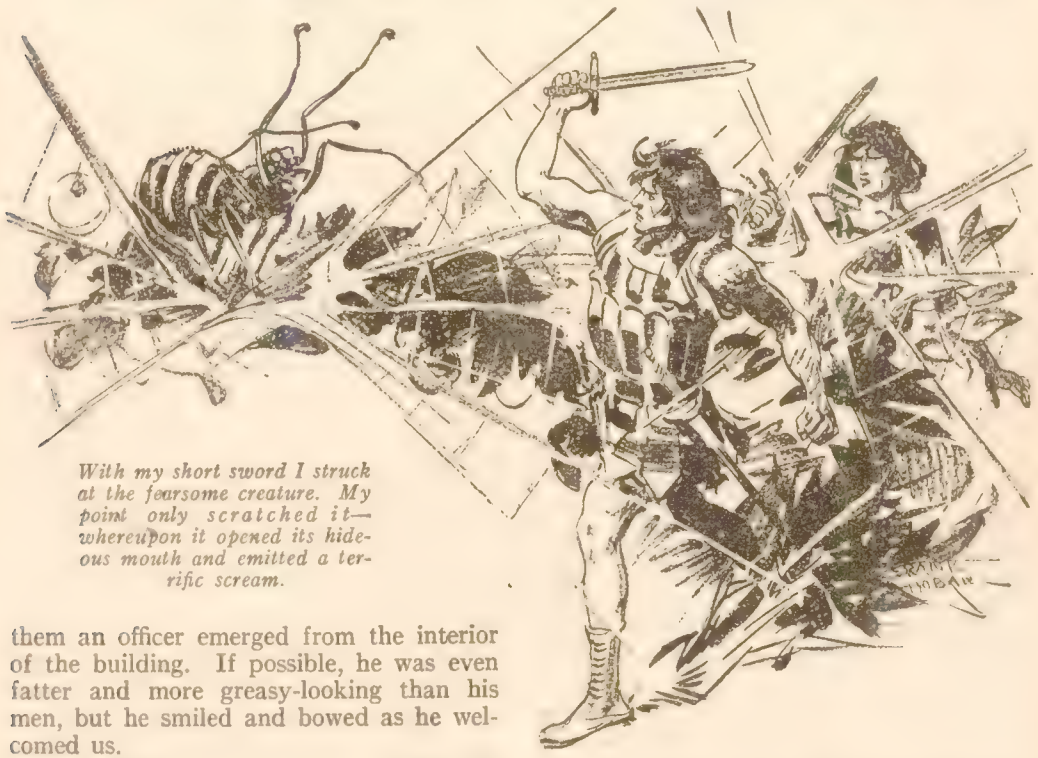
I recall distinctly, even now, that in that very instant with all that was transpiring to distract my attention, I was suddenly struck by wonder that it should have been Tavia's face and figure that I saw rather than those of Sanoma Tora. You may believe that I brought myself up with a round turn and thereafter it was a vision of Sanoma Tora that I saw and that, too, without any disloyalty to my friendship for Tavia—that blessed friendship which I regarded as one of my proudest and most valuable possessions.

As the girls reached the pavement they came eagerly toward us. "Welcome, warriors," cried one, "to happy Ghasta! After your long journey you must be hungry. Come with us and you shall be fed, but first the great Jed will wish to greet you and welcome you to our city—for visitors to Ghasta are few."

AS they led us along the avenue I could not but note the deserted appearance of the city. There was no sign of life about any of buildings that we passed nor did we see another human being until we had come to an open plaza, in the center of which rose a mighty building surmounted by the lofty tower that we had seen when we first emerged from the forest. Here we saw a number of people, both men and women—sad, dejected-looking people, who moved with bent shoulders and downcast eyes.

There was no animation in their step and their whole demeanor seemed that of utter hopelessness.

What a contrast they presented to the gay and happy girls who so joyously conducted us toward the main entrance of the jed! Here, burly warriors were on guard—fat, oily-looking fellows, whose appearance was not at all to my liking. As we approached



With my short sword I struck at the fearsome creature. My point only scratched it—whereupon it opened its hideous mouth and emitted a terrific scream.

them an officer emerged from the interior of the building. If possible, he was even fatter and more greasy-looking than his men, but he smiled and bowed as he welcomed us.

"Greetings!" he exclaimed. "May the peace of Ghasta be upon the strangers who enter her gates."

"Send word to Ghron, the great Jed," said one of the girls to him, "that we are bringing two strange warriors who wish to do honor to him before partaking of the hospitality of Ghasta."

After the officer had dispatched a warrior to notify the jed of our coming, we were escorted into the interior of the palace. The furnishings were striking, but extremely fantastic in design and execution. The native wood of the forests had been used to fine advantage in the construction of numerous pieces of beautifully carved furniture, the grain of the woods showing lustrously in their various natural colors, the beauties of which were sometimes accentuated by delicate stain and by high polishes, but perhaps the most striking feature of the interior decorations was the gorgeously painted fabric that covered the walls and ceilings. It was a fabric of unbelievable lightness, which gave the impression of spun silver. So closely woven was it that, as I was to learn later, it would hold water and of such great strength that it was almost impossible to tear it.

Upon it were painted in brilliant colors the most fantastic scenes that imagination might conceive. There were spiders with the heads of beautiful women, and women with the heads of spiders. There were flowers and trees that danced beneath a great red sun, and great lizards, such as we had passed within the gloomy cavern on our journey down from Tjanath. In all the figures that were depicted there was nothing represented as nature had created it. It was as though some mad mind had conceived the whole.

As we waited in the great entrance-hall of the palace of the jed, four of the girls danced for our entertainment—a strange dance such as I had never before seen upon Barsoom. Its steps and movements were as weird and fantastic as the mural decorations of the room in which it was executed,

and yet withal there was a certain rhythm and suggestiveness in the undulations of those lithe bodies that imparted to us a feeling of well-being and content.

THE fat and greasy padwar of the guard moistened his thick lips as he watched them and though he had doubtless seen them dance upon many occasions, he seemed to be much more affected than we, but perhaps he had no Phao or Sanoma Tora to occupy his thoughts.

Sanoma Tora! The chiseled beauty of her noble face stood out clearly upon the screen of memory for a brief instant and then slowly it began to fade. I tried to recall it, to see again the short, haughty lip and the cold, level gaze, but it receded into a blur from which there presently emerged a pair of wondrous eyes, moist with tears, a perfect face and a head of tousled hair.

It was then that the warrior returned to say that Ghron the Jed would receive us at once. Only the girls accompanied us, the fat padwar remaining behind, though I could have sworn that it was not through choice.

The room in which the jed received us was upon the second level of the palace. It was a large room, even more grotesquely decorated than those through which we had passed. The furniture was of weird shapes and sizes; nothing harmonized with anything else and yet the result was a harmony of discord that was not unpleasing.

The jed sat upon a perfectly enormous throne of volcanic glass. It was, perhaps, the most ornate and remarkable piece of furniture that I have ever seen and was the outstanding specimen of craftsmanship in the entire city of Ghasta, but if it caught my eye at the time it was only for an instant, as nothing could for long distract one's attention from the jed himself. In the first glance he looked more like a hairy ape than a man. He was massively built with great, heavy, stooping shoulders and long arms covered with shaggy, black hair, the more remarkable, perhaps, because there is no race of hairy men upon Barsoom. His face was broad and flat and his eyes were so far apart that they seemed literally to be set in the corners of his face. As we were halted before him, he twisted his mouth into what I imagined at the time was intended for a smile, but which only succeeded in making him look more horrible than before.

As is customary, we laid our swords at his feet and announced our names and our cities.

"Hadron of Hastor, Nur An of Jahar," he repeated. "Ghron the Jed welcomes you to Ghasta. Few are the visitors who find their way to our beautiful city. It is an event, therefore, when two such illustrious warriors honor us with a visit. Seldom do we receive word from the outer world. Tell us, then, of your journey and of what is transpiring upon the surface of Barsoom above us."

His words and his manner were those of a most solicitous host bent upon extending a proper and cordial welcome to strangers, but I could not rid myself of the belying suggestion of his repulsive countenance, though I could do no less than play the part of a grateful and appreciative guest.

We told our stories and gave him much news of those portions of Barsoom with which each of us was familiar and as Nur An spoke, I looked about me at the assemblage in the great chamber. They were mostly women and many of them were young and beautiful. The men, for the most part, were gross-looking, fat and oily, and there were certain lines of cruelty about their eyes and their mouths that did not escape me, though I tried to attribute it to the first depressing impression that the black and somber buildings and the deserted avenues had conveyed to my mind.

WHEN we had finished our recitals, Ghron announced that a banquet had been prepared in our honor and in person he led the procession from the throne-room down a long corridor to a mighty banquet hall, in the center of which stood a great table, down the entire length of which was a magnificent decoration consisting entirely of the fruits and flowers of the forest through which we had passed. At one end of the table was the jed's throne and at the other were smaller thrones, one for Nur An and one for me. Seated on either side of us were the girls who had welcomed us to the city and whose business, it seemed, now was to entertain us.

The design of the dishes with which the table was set was quite in keeping with all the other mad designs of the palace of Ghron. No two plates or goblets or platters were of the same shape or size or design and nothing seemed suited to the purpose for which it was intended. My wine was served in a shallow, triangular-shaped

saucer, while my meat was crammed into a tall, slender-stemmed goblet. However, I was too hungry to be particular and, I hoped, too well conversant with the amenities of polite society to reveal the astonishment that I felt.

HERE, as in other parts of the palace, the wall coverings were of the gossamer-like silver fabric that had attracted my attention and admiration the moment that I had entered the building and so fascinated was I by it that I could not refrain from mentioning it to the girl who sat at my right.

"There is no such fabric anywhere else in Barsoom," she said. "It is made here and only here."

"It is very beautiful," I said. "Other nations would pay well for it."

"If we could get it to them," she said, "but we have no intercourse with the world above us."

"Of what is it woven?" I asked.

"When you entered the valley Hohr," she said, "you saw a beautiful forest, running down to the banks of the river Syl. Doubtless you saw fruit in the forest and, being hungry, you sought to gather it, but you were set upon by huge spiders that sped along silver threads, finer than a woman's hair."

"Yes," I said, "that is just what happened."

"It is from this web, spun by those hideous spiders, that we weave our fabric. It is as strong as leather and as enduring as the rocks of which Ghasta is built."

"Do women of Ghasta spin this wonderful fabric?" I asked.

"The slaves," she said, "both men and women."

"And from whence come your slaves," I asked, "if you have no intercourse with the upper world?"

"Many of them come down the river from Tjanath, where they have died the Death, and there are others who come from farther up the river—but why they come or from whence we never know. They are silent people, who will not tell us, and sometimes they come from down the river, but these are few and usually are so crazed by the horrors of their journey that we can glean no knowledge from them."

"And do any ever go on down the river from Ghasta?" I asked; for it was in that direction that Nur An and I hoped to make our way in search of liberty. Deep within me was the hope that we might reach the valley Dor and the lost sea of Korus, from which I was convinced I could escape as have John Carter and Tars Tarkas.

"A few, perhaps," she said, "but we never know what becomes of these, for none returns."

"You are happy here?" I asked.

She forced a smile to her beautiful lips, but I thought that a shudder ran through her frame. . . . .

The banquet was elaborate and the food delicious. There was a great deal of laughter at the far end of the table where the jed sat, for those about him watched him closely and when he laughed, which he always did at his own jokes, the others all laughed uproariously.

NEAR the end of the meal a troupe of dancers entered the apartment. My first view of them almost took my breath away for, with but a single exception, they were all horribly deformed. That one exception was the most beautiful girl I have ever seen—with the saddest face I have ever seen. She danced divinely and about her hopped and crawled the poor, unhappy creatures whose sad afflictions should have made them the objects of sympathy rather than ridicule and yet it was obvious that they had been selected for their part for the sole purpose of giving the audience an opportunity to vent its ridicule upon them. The sight of them seemed to incite Ghron to a pitch of frenzied mirth and to add to his own pleasure and the discomforts of the poor, pathetic performers, he hurled food and plates at them as they danced about the banquet table.

I tried not to look at them, but there was a fascination in their deformities which attracted my gaze and presently it became apparent to me that the majority of them were artificially deformed, that they had been thus broken and bent at the behest of some malign mind—and as I looked down the long board at the horrid face of Ghron, distorted by maniacal laughter, I could not but guess the author of their disfigurement.

When at last they were gone, three large goblets of wine were borne into the banquet hall by a slave; two of them were red goblets and one was black. The black goblet was set before Ghron and the red ones before Nur An and me. Then Ghron rose and the whole company followed his example.

"Ghron the Jed drinks to the happiness of his honored guests," announced the ruler, and raising the goblet to his lips he drained it to the bottom.

It seemed obvious that this little ceremony would conclude the banquet and that it was intended that Nur An and I should drink the health of our host. I, therefore, raised my goblet. It was the first time that anything had been served to me in the proper receptacle and I was glad that at last I might drink without incurring the danger of spilling most of the contents of the receptacle into my lap.

"To the health and power of the great jed, Ghron," I said, and following my host's example, drained the contents of the goblet.

As Nur An followed my example with some appropriate words, I felt a sudden lethargy stealing over me and in the instant before I lost consciousness I realized that I had been given drugged wine.

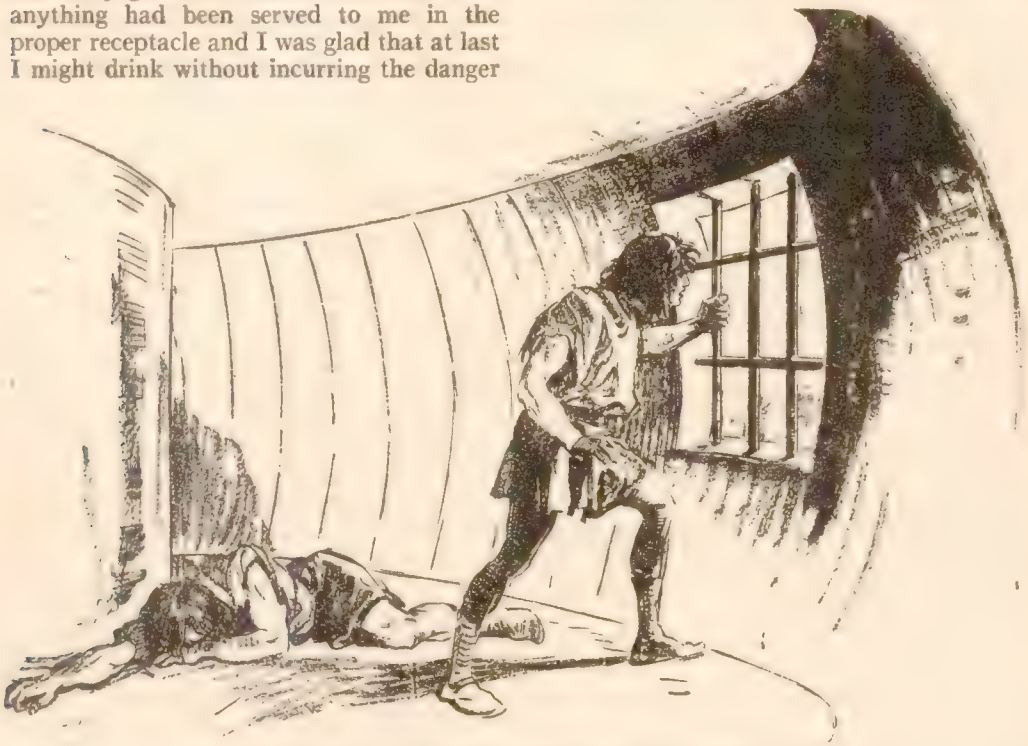
When I regained consciousness, I found myself lying upon the bare floor of a room of a peculiar shape that suggested that it was that portion of the arc of a circle lying between the peripheries of two concentric circles. The narrow end of the room curved inward, the wider end outward. In the latter was a single, grated window; no door or other openings appeared in any of the walls, which were covered with the same silver fabric that I had noticed upon the walls and ceilings of the palace of the jed. Near me lay Nur An, evidently still under the influence of the opiate that had been administered to us in the wine.

Again I looked about the room. I arose and went to the window. Far below me I saw the roofs of the city. Evidently we were imprisoned in the lofty tower that rose from the center of the palace of the jed. But how had we been brought into the room? Certainly not through the window, which must have been fully two hundred feet above the city. While I was pondering this seemingly unanswerable problem, Nur An regained consciousness. At first he did not speak; he just lay there looking at me with a rueful smile upon his lips.

"Well?" I asked.

Nur An shook his head. "We still live," he said dismally, "but that is about the best that one may say."

"We are in the palace of a maniac, Nur An," I said. "There is no doubt in my mind as to that. Every one here lives in constant terror of Ghron and from what I have seen today they are warranted in feeling terror."



Near me lay Nur An, still under the influence of the opiate. I went to the window. Far below lay the roofs of the city.

"Yet I believe we saw little or nothing at that," said Nur An.

"I saw enough," I replied.

"Those girls were so beautiful," he said after a moment's silence, "I could not believe that such beauty and such duplicity could exist together."

"Perhaps they were the unwilling tools of a cruel master," I suggested.

"I shall always like to think so," he said.

THE day waned and night fell; no one came near us, but in the meantime I discovered something. In accidentally leaning against the wall at the narrow end of our room, I discovered that it was very warm, in fact quite hot, and from this I inferred that the flue of the chimney from which we had seen the smoke issuing rose through the center of the tower and the wall of the chimney formed the rear wall of our apartment. It was a discovery, but at the moment it meant nothing to us.

There were no lights in our apartment and as only Cluros was in the heavens and he upon the opposite side of the tower, our prison was in almost total darkness. We were sitting in gloomy contemplation of our predicament, each wrapped in his own unhappy thoughts, when I heard footsteps apparently approaching from below. I heard them as they came nearer and nearer until finally they ceased in an adjoining apartment, seemingly the one next to ours. A moment later there was a scraping sound and a line of light appeared at the bottom of one of the side walls.

This light kept growing in width until I finally realized that the entire partition wall was rising. In the opening we saw at first the sandaled feet of warriors, and finally, little by little, their entire bodies were revealed—two stalwart, brawny men, heavily armed. They carried manacles and with them they fastened our wrists behind our backs. They did not speak, but with a gesture one of them directed us to follow him and as we filed out of the room, the second warrior fell in behind us. In silence we entered a steep, spiral ramp, which we descended to the main body of the palace, but yet our escorts conducted us still lower until I knew that we must be in the pits beneath the palace.

The pits! Inwardly I shuddered. I much preferred the tower for I have always possessed an inherent horror of the pits. Perhaps these would be utterly dark and doubtless overrun by rats and lizards.

The ramp ended in a gorgeously decorated apartment in which was assembled about the same company of men and women that had partaken of the banquet with us earlier in the day. Here, too, was Ghron upon a throne. This time he did not smile as we entered the room. He did not seem to realize our presence. He was sitting, leaning forward, his eyes fixed upon something at the far end of the room over which hung a deadly silence that was suddenly shattered by a piercing scream of anguish, which was but a prelude to a series of similar cries of agony.

I looked quickly in the direction from which the screams came—the direction in which Ghron's gaze was fastened. I saw a naked woman chained to a grill before a hot fire. Evidently they had just placed her there, as I had entered the room, and it was her first shrill scream that had attracted my attention.

The grill was mounted upon wheels, so that it could be removed to any distance from the fire that the torturer chose, or completely turned about, presenting the other side of the victim to the blaze.

As my eyes wandered back to the audience, I saw that most of the girls sat there glaring straight ahead, their eyes fixed with horror upon the horrid scene. I do not believe that they enjoyed it; I know that they did not. They were equally the unwilling victims of the cruel vagaries of Ghron's diseased mind, but like the poor creature upon the grill they were helpless.

NEXT to the torture itself, the most diabolical conceit of the mind that had directed it was the utter silence enjoined upon all spectators, against the background of which the shrieks and moans of the tortured victim evidently achieved their highest effectiveness upon the crazed mind of the jed.

The spectacle was sickening. I turned my eyes away. Presently one of the warriors who had fetched us touched me on the arm and motioned me to follow him.

He led us from this apartment to another, and there we witnessed a scene infinitely more terrible than the grilling of the human victim. I cannot describe it; it tortures my memory even to think of it. Long before we reached that hideous apartment we heard the screams and curses of its inmates. In utter silence, our guard ushered us within. It was the chamber of horrors in which the jed of Ghasta was

creating abnormal deformities for his cruel dance of the cripples.

Still in silence, we were led from this horrid place and now our guide conducted us upward to a luxuriously furnished apartment. Upon divans lay two of the beautiful girls who had welcomed us to Ghasta.

For the first time since we had left our room in the tower one of our escorts broke the silence. "They will explain," he said, pointing to the girls. "Do not try to escape. There is only one exit from this room. We will be waiting outside." He then removed our manacles and with his companion left the apartment, closing the door after them.

ONE of the occupants of the room was the same girl who had sat at my right during the banquet. I had found her most gracious and intelligent and to her I now turned.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded. "Why are we made prisoners? Why have we been brought here?"

She beckoned me to come to the divan on which she reclined and as I approached she motioned to me to sit down beside her.

"What you have seen tonight," she said, "represents the three fates that lie in store for you. Ghron has taken a fancy to you and he is giving you your choice."

"I do not yet quite understand," I said.

"You saw the victim before the grill?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Would you care to suffer that fate?"

"Scarcely."

"You saw the unhappy ones being bent and broken for the dance of the cripples," she pursued.

"I did," I answered.

"And now you see this luxurious room—and me. Which would you choose?"

"I CANNOT believe," I replied, "that the final alternative is without conditions, which might make it appear less attractive than it now seems, for otherwise there could be no possible question as to which I would choose."

"You are right," she said. "There are conditions."

"What are they?" I asked.

"You will become an officer in the palace of the jed and as such you will conduct tortures similar to those you have witnessed in the pits of the palace. You will be guided by whatever whim may possess your master."

I drew myself to my full height. "I choose the fire," I said.

"I knew that you would," she said sadly, "and yet I hoped that you might not."

"It is not because of you," I said quickly. "It is the other conditions—which no man of honor could accept."

"I know," she said, "and had you accepted them I must eventually have despised you as I despise the others."

"You are unhappy here?" I asked.

"Of course," she said. "Who but a maniac could be happy in this horrid place? There are, perhaps, six hundred people in the city and there is not one who knows happiness. A hundred of us form the court of the jed; the others are slaves. As a matter of fact, we are all slaves, subject to every mad whim or caprice of the maniac who is our master."

"I shall escape," I said.

"How?"

"The fire," I replied.

SHE shuddered. "I do not know why I should care so much," she said, "unless it is that I liked you from the first. Even while I was helping to lure you into the city for the human spider of Ghasta, I wished that I might warn you not to enter, but I was afraid, just as I am afraid to die. I wish that I had your courage to escape through the fire."

I turned to Nur An, who had been listening to our conversation. "You have reached your decision?" I asked.

"Certainly," he said. "There could be but one decision for a man of honor."

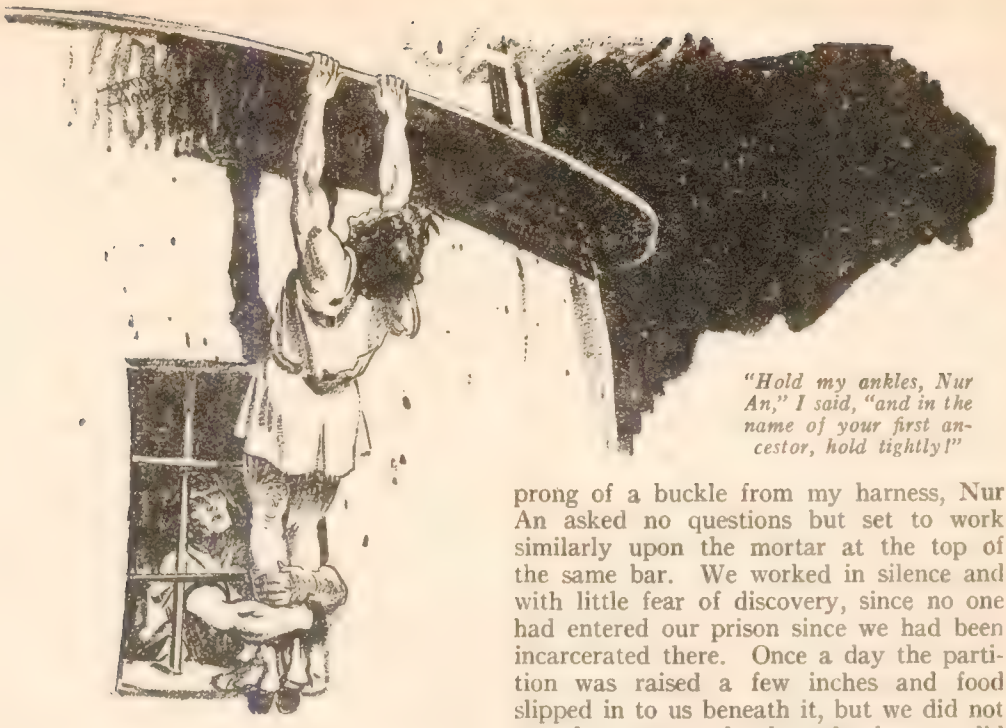
"Good!" I exclaimed, and then I turned to the girl. "You will notify Ghron of our decision?" I asked.

"Wait," she said; "ask for time in which to consider it. I know that it will make no difference in the end, but yet—oh, even yet there is a germ of hope within me that even utter hopelessness cannot destroy."

"You are right," I said. "There is always hope. Let him think that you have half persuaded us to accept the life of luxury and ease that he has offered as an alternative to death or torture, and that if you are given a little more time you may succeed. In the meantime we may be able to work out some plan of escape."

"Never!" she said. . . . .

When back in our quarters in the chimney tower, Nur An and I discussed every mad plan of escape that entered our brains. For some reason our fetters had not been



"Hold my ankles, Nur An," I said, "and in the name of your first ancestor, hold tightly!"

replaced, which gave us at least as much freedom of action as our apartment afforded and you may rest assured that we took full advantage of it, examining minutely every square inch of the floor and the walls as far up as we could reach; but our combined efforts failed to reveal any means for raising the partition which closed the only avenue of escape from our prison, with the exception of the window which, while heavily barred and some two hundred feet above the ground, was by no means therefore eliminated from our plans.

The heavy vertical bars which protected the window withstood our combined efforts when we sought to bend them, though Nur An is a powerful man, while I have always been lauded for my unusual muscular development. The bars were set a little too close together to permit our bodies to pass through, but the removal of one of them would leave an opening of ample size; yet to what purpose? Perhaps the same answer was in Nur An's mind that was in mine—that when hope was gone and the sole alternative remaining was the fire within the grill, we might at least cheat Ghron could we but hurl ourselves from this high-flung window to the ground far below.

But whatever end each of us may have had in view, he kept it to himself and when I started digging at the mortar at the bottom of one of the bars with the prong of a buckle from my harness, Nur An asked no questions but set to work similarly upon the mortar at the top of the same bar. We worked in silence and with little fear of discovery, since no one had entered our prison since we had been incarcerated there. Once a day the partition was raised a few inches and food slipped in to us beneath it, but we did not see the person who brought it, nor did anyone communicate with us from the time that the guards had taken us to the palace that first night up to the moment that we had finally succeeded in loosening the bar so that it could be easily removed from its seat.

I shall never forget with what impatience we awaited the coming of night, that we might remove the bar and investigate the surrounding surface of the tower, for it had occurred to me that it might offer a means of descent to the ground below, or rather to the roof of the building which it surmounted, from where we might hope to make our way to the summit of the city wall undetected. Already, in view of this possibility, I had planned to tear strips from the fabric covering our walls wherewith to make a rope down which we might lower ourselves to the ground beyond the city wall.

AS night approached I began to realize how high I had built my hopes upon this idea. It already seemed as good as accomplished, especially when I had utilized the possibilities of the rope to its fullest extent, which included making one of sufficient length to reach from our window to the bottom of the tower. Thus every obstacle was overcome. It was just at dusk that I explained my plan to Nur An.

"Fine," he exclaimed. "Let us start at

once making our rope. We know how strong this fabric is and that a slender strand of it will support our weight. There is enough upon one wall to make all the rope we need."

SUCCESS seemed almost assured as we started to remove the fabric from one of the larger walls, but here we met with our first obstacle. The fabric was fastened at the top and at the bottom with large-headed nails, set close together, which withstood our every effort to tear it loose. Thin and light in weight, this remarkable fabric appeared absolutely indestructible and we were almost exhausted by our efforts when we were finally forced to admit defeat.

The quick Barsoomian night had fallen and we might now, with comparative safety, remove the bar from the window and reconnoiter for the first time beyond the restricted limits of our cell; but hope was now low within our breasts and it was with little anticipation of encouragement that I drew myself to the sill and projected my head and shoulders through the aperture.

Below me lay the somber, gloomy city, its blackness relieved by but a few dim lights, most of which shone faintly from the palace windows. I passed my palm over the surface of the tower that lay within arm's reach, and again my heart sank within me. Smooth, almost glass-like volcanic rock, beautifully cut and laid, offered not the slightest handhold—indeed an insect might have found it difficult to have clung to its polished surface.

"It is quite hopeless," I said as I drew my head back into the room. "The tower is as smooth as a woman's breast."

"What is above?" asked Nur An.

Again I leaned out, this time looking upward. Just above me were the eaves of the tower—our cell was at the highest level of the structure. Something impelled me to investigate in that direction—an insane urge, perhaps, born of despair.

"Hold my ankles, Nur An," I said, "and in the name of your first ancestor, hold tightly!"

Clinging to two of the remaining bars I raised myself to a standing position upon the window ledge, while Nur An clung to my ankles. I could just reach the top of the eaves with my extended fingers. Lowering myself again to the sill, I whispered to Nur An. "I am going to attempt to reach the roof of the tower," I exclaimed.

"Why?" he asked.

I laughed. "I do not know," I admitted, "but something within my inner consciousness seems insistently to urge me on."

"If you fall," he said, "you will have escaped the fire—and I will follow you. Good luck, my friend from Hastor!"

Once again I raised myself to a standing position upon the sill and reached upward until my fingers bent above the edge of the lofty roof. Slowly I drew myself upward; below me, two hundred feet, lay the palace roof and death. I am very strong—only a very strong man could have hoped to succeed, for I had at best but a precarious hold upon the flat roof above me, but, at last, I succeeded in getting an elbow over; then I drew my body slowly over the edge until, at last, I lay panting upon the basalt flagging that topped the slender tower.

CHAPTER X

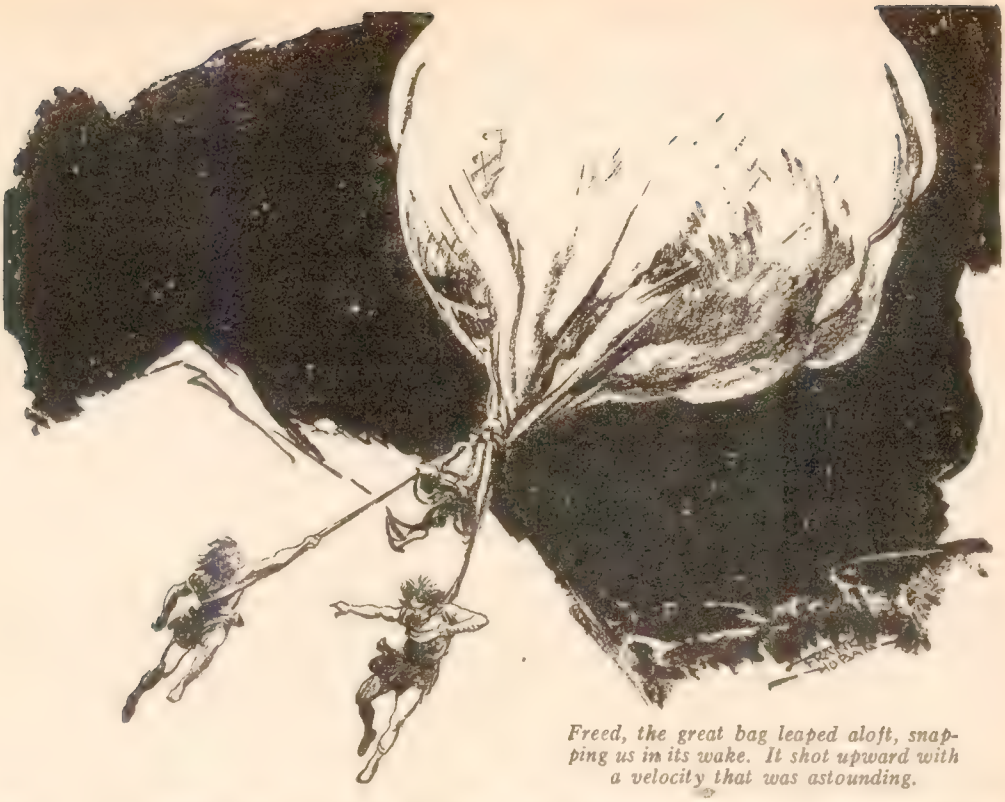
Phor Tak of Jhama

RESTING a few moments, I arose to my feet. Mad, passionate Thuria raced across the cloudless sky; Cluros, her cold spouse, swung his aloof circle in splendid isolation; below me lay the valley of Hohr like some enchanted fairyland of ancient lore; above me frowned the beetling cliff that hemmed in this madman's world.

A puff of hot air struck me suddenly in the face, recalling to my mind that far below in the pits of Ghasta an orgy of torture was occurring. Faintly a scream arose from the black mouth of the flue behind me. I shuddered, but my attention was centered upon the yawning opening now and I approached it. Almost unbearable waves of heat were billowing upward from the mouth of the chimney. There was little smoke, so perfect was the combustion, but what there was shot into the air at terrific velocity. It almost seemed that were I to cast myself upon it I should be carried far aloft.

It was then that a thought was born—a mad, impossible idea, it seemed, and yet it clung to me as I lowered myself gingerly over the outer edge of the tower and finally regained the greater security of my cell.

I was about to explain my insane plan to Nur An when I was interrupted by sounds from the adjoining chamber and an instant later the partition started to rise. I thought



Freed, the great bag leaped aloft, snapping us in its wake. It shot upward with a velocity that was astounding.

they were bringing us food again, but the partition rose farther than was necessary for the passing of food receptacles beneath it and a moment later we saw the ankles and legs of a woman beneath the base of the rising wall. Then a girl stooped and entered our cell. In the light from the adjoining room I recognized her—she who had been selected by Ghron to lure me to his will. Her name was Sharu.

NUR AN had quickly replaced the bar in the window and when the girl entered there was nothing to indicate that aught was amiss, or that one of us had so recently been outside our cell. The partition remained half raised, permitting light to enter the apartment, and the girl, looking at me, must have noticed my gaze wandering to the adjoining room.

"Do not let your hope rise," she said with a rueful smile. "There are guards waiting at the level next below."

"Why are you here, Sharu?" I asked.

"Ghron sent me," she replied. "He is impatient for your decision."

I thought quickly. Our only hope lay in the sympathy of this girl, whose attitude in the past had at least demonstrated her friendliness. "Had we a dagger and a needle," I said in a low whisper, "we could give Ghron his answer upon the morning of the day after tomorrow."

"What reason can I give him for this further delay?" she asked doubtfully.

"Tell him," said Nur An, "that we are communing with our ancestors and that upon their advice will depend our decision."

Sharu smiled. She drew a dagger from its sheath at her side and laid it upon the floor and from a pocket pouch attached to her harness she produced a needle, which she laid beside the dagger. "I shall convince Ghron that it is best to wait," she said. "My heart had hoped, Hadron of Hastor, that you would decide to remain with me, but I am glad that I have not been mistaken in my estimate of your character. You will die, my warrior, but at least you will die as a brave man should and undefiled. Good-by! I look upon you in life for the last time, but until I am gathered to my ancestors your image shall remain enshrined within my heart."

She was gone; the partition dropped, and again we were left in the semi-darkness of a moonlit night; but now we had the two things that I most desired—a dagger and a needle.

"Of what good are those?" asked Nur An, as I picked up the two articles from the floor.

"You shall see," I replied, and immediately I set to work cutting the fabric from the walls of our cell and then, standing upon Nur An's shoulders, I removed also that which covered the ceiling. I worked quickly for I knew that we had little time in which to accomplish that which I had set out to do. A mad scheme it was, in truth, and yet withal within the realms of practicability.

WORKING in the dark, more by sense of feel than by sight, I must have been inspired by some higher power to have accomplished with any degree of perfection the task that I had set myself.

The balance of that night and all of the following day Nur An and I labored without rest until we had fashioned an enormous bag from the fabric that had covered the walls and ceiling of our cell and from the scraps that remained we fashioned long ropes. When night fell again our task was completed.

"May luck be with us," I said.

"The scheme is worthy of the mad brain of Ghron himself," said Nur An; "yet it has within it the potentialities of success."

"Night has fallen," I said; "we need not delay longer. Of one thing, however, we may be sure, whether we succeed or fail we shall have escaped the fire and in either event may our ancestors look with love and compassion upon Sharu, whose friendship has made possible our attempt."

"Whose love," corrected Nur An.

ONCE again I made the perilous ascent to the roof, taking one of our new-made ropes with me. Then, from the summit, I lowered it to Nur An, who fastened the great bag to it; after which I drew the fruits of our labors carefully to the roof beside me. It was as light as a feather, yet stronger than the well-tanned hide of a zitidar. Next, I lowered the rope and assisted Nur An to my side, but not until we had replaced the bar that we had removed from the window.

Attached to the bottom of our bag, which was open, were a number of long cords, terminating in loops. Through these loops we passed the longest rope that we had made—a rope so long that it entirely encircled the circumference of the tower—when we lowered it below the projecting eaves. We made it fast there, but with a slipknot that could be instantly released with a single jerk.

Next, we slid the loops at the end of the ropes attached to the bottom of the bag along the cord that encircled the tower below the eaves until we had maneuvered the opening of the bag directly over the mouth of the flue leading down into the furnace of death in the pits of Ghasta. Standing upon either side of the flue Nur An and I lifted the bag until it commenced to fill with the hot air rushing from the chimney. Presently it was sufficiently inflated to remain in an erect position, whereupon, leaving Nur An to steady it, I moved the loops until they were at equal distances from one another, thus anchoring the bag directly over the center of the flue. Then I passed another rope loosely through the loops and secured its ends together, and to opposite sides of this rope Nur An and I snapped the boarding hooks that are a part of the harness of every Barsoomian warrior, the primary purpose of which is to lower boarding parties from the deck of one ship to that of another directly below, but which in practice are used in countless ways and numerous emergencies.

THEN we waited, Nur An ready to slip the knot that held the rope around the tower beneath the eaves and I, upon the opposite side, with Sharu's sharp dagger prepared to cut the rope upon my side.

I saw the great bag that we had made filling with hot air. At first, loosely inflated, it rocked and swayed, but presently, its sides distended, it strained upward. Its fabric stretched tightly until I thought that it should burst. It tugged and pulled at its restraining cords, and yet I waited.

Down in the valley of Hohr there was little or no wind, which greatly facilitated the carrying out of our rash venture.

The great bag, almost as large as the room in which we had been confined, bellied above us. It strained upon its guy ropes in its impatience to be aloft until I wondered they held. Then I gave the word.

Simultaneously Nur An slipped his knot and I severed the rope upon the opposite side. Freed, the great bag leaped aloft, snapping us in its wake. It shot upward with a velocity that was astounding, until the valley of Hohr was but a little hollow in the surface of the great world that lay below us.

Adventures still more amazing now befall Hadron of Hastor—vividly described in the next installment, in our forthcoming July issue.

The Murder at the Beach

"It's usually among those nearest and dearest that you find the murderer." And on this theory our young investigator proceeded.

By CHARLES F. LENT

Illustrated by Henry Thiede

"George, they're going to pinch you! Jump into my car, and we can go some place."

I MUST be psychic or something; I've been that way ever since I was a kid. I could tell then when we were going to have a thunderstorm or when there was a cat in the room. It's a gift; you either have it or you don't. It's due to this extra sense I've got that I solved the Underwood murder—with Kitty's help. I don't deserve any real credit for it. . . . .

Lots of kids don't know what they want to be when they grow up. Some want to be a cop, a sailor, or since Lindy, an aviator. I never wanted to be any of those things; I wanted to be a newspaper man when *I* grew up. I did it, too; that's more than most kids do. They switch from one thing to another and then end by taking the first job they can get. Not me. I got a place in the business office of the New York *Star* when I left high school.

I didn't stay in the business office long. I jumped at the chance to be Westchester County correspondent of the *Star*. Westchester is a big county, and it had to be covered right, so I bought a little car, had it lettered THE NEW YORK STAR and was all set. I have a regular round, the city halls, the police-stations, the country-clubs, the yacht-clubs, the churches, the courts, the schools. Plenty of news of its kind—no big stories, though, like New York. But—

THE Sunday of the murder was a scorcher. By ten o'clock that morning you could fry eggs anywhere in the open. Everybody who hadn't left New York before, did it that morning, hunting for a place that was cool. I knew that with such crowds there would be news—automobile accidents, if nothing else. So right after breakfast I got into my car and started to look around. I drove over to the Bronx Parkway and up to White Plains; then I turned toward Long Island Sound and finally made for Rye Beach.

I never have seen such a crowd at Rye Beach before or since. Thousands there, and more coming every minute. There were long lines waiting to get a bathhouse. That didn't worry me at all, for the manager let me use a room in his cottage. One of the advantages of being a newspaperman is that they take care of you, no matter who else has to wait.

I plunged into the water. My, but it felt good! I swam out to the float. It was so crowded that I could not climb on at first. It would comfortably accommodate

twenty people, and at least fifty stood on it when I arrived alongside. The least movement at the center spilled those on the edges off into the water.

There was a lot of fooling and scuffling in one crowd that sent a lot of them off into the water. I saw my chance, and climbed up and stood watching the crowd.

A boy of about twelve climbed up beside me, then with a broad grin on his face dived joyously off into the cool green depths. I was about to follow him when he came up, looking scared. He clung breathlessly to the edge of the float and tried to make himself heard above the shouting.

I watched him carelessly for a moment; then, as he looked really frightened, I dived into the water and swam to his side.

"What is it, kid? What's the trouble?" I asked.

"There's a woman down there, drowned," he gasped.

"You sure?"

The boy shuddered.

"Of course I'm sure. I was swimming under water with my eyes open. I saw her plain as can be; besides, I touched her."

I didn't waste any time: reaching up, I yanked the feet from under a fellow standing on the edge right by my hand. He tumbled into the water, carrying several others with him. I climbed up into the gap and yelled:

"Say, fellows, stop your fooling. Listen to me. This kid says there is a woman drowned down there."

I pointed to the water beside the float.

A FRIGHTENED hush fell on the crowd. Startled, the bathers turned to look where I pointed and kept silent. A big strong fellow started toward me.

"What boy? And where?" he inquired.

I pointed to the boy still clinging to the float. He confirmed what I had said by nodding his head vigorously.

A girl in a green bathing-suit asked fearfully:

"Do you suppose it's so, Joe?"

Evidently the big fellow's name was Joe.

"I doubt it, Edith, but we'll see. Come on, fellows, this kid says there is a woman in trouble down there. Let's see if he's right."

He dived. I followed. Now, I can swim, but I can't see under water the way some can. I swam in what I thought was the right direction and struck a body. I knew instantly it was not one of the other fellows. Don't ask me how I knew, but I did, that the person I touched was not alive. I came to the surface about as badly scared as the kid had been. Joe came up right beside me. He climbed up on the float and said soberly:

"The kid is right. There is a woman down there."

The crowd shuddered and gasped. I climbed up beside Joe. No one seemed to know what to do, so I took charge.

"Some one swim ashore and get the life-saver. He will know what to do when we get her to the surface," I directed.

Then I caught sight of two boys in a canoe near the float. I yelled at them.

"Hey, you kids in that canoe! Come here, quick. We need help."

Wondering, the boys obeyed me. Several fellows were swimming toward shore. I turned to the girl Joe had called Edith.

"Get in—it will be faster than swimming. Get the life-saver, and a doctor too, if you can. Understand?"

She nodded her head and got into the canoe.

"Now, kids, paddle like hell. Get this girl ashore. There is a woman in trouble down there. We need a doctor. Go to it, kids. Every minute is precious."

The canoe fairly leaped on its way.

Turning to the people on the float, I ordered the women to swim to shore. I explained that we would need the space on the float. Sobbing, frightened, they obeyed me. Joe had selected some of his pals while I was busy, and in a moment we were all over into the water. When we lifted the limp body to the float, I saw that she was young and wore a vivid red bathing-suit.

A dozen voices shouted directions for first aid. One fellow insisted that we roll her on a barrel. That advice may have been good, but we had no barrel. Then I got a good look at her face for the first time. I stared in amazement. I knew her —she was Rita Underwood, from my home town, New Rochelle!

When I say that I knew her, don't you get the idea that we were pals or anything like that. No, indeed, Rita Underwood belonged to the smart set in New Rochelle, and naturally, I didn't. To travel with her set takes money. But I knew her by sight. What puzzled me was trying to figure out what she was doing at Rye Beach.

Rita Underwood didn't swim at a public beach as a usual thing. Her old man belongs to the Yacht Club, where there is

a pool for members and their families. He belonged to a swell beach club where all her set went in swimming. Yet on a hot August Sunday she had come to Rye Beach! It didn't seem reasonable to me.

I stood there dumfounded and never raised a hand to help. I had a feeling that it was useless; you see, something told me she was dead.

Then Doc Whitely, an interne from the White Plains Hospital, who happened to be on the beach, came out to the float in a launch and took charge. I knew the Doc. Lots of auto-accident cases are taken to the White Plains Hospital, and I'd met the Doc often. Doc is as smart as a steel trap. You'll hear of that pill-giver when he gets through learning to be a doctor and starts up for himself! In about two minutes he looks up and tells them to lay off all the first-aid stunts. One guy protested that he knew of a case where a fellow was resuscitated after three hours.

"That's no doubt so, but you could keep this up for eternity and you'd do no good. The girl is dead; not drowned—stabbed. She has been dead for some time. This is murder," said the Doc gravely.

YOU could have knocked the bunch of us over with a feather. Me? I was hit harder than the rest, for I knew who she was. It didn't seem possible. Rita Underwood dead—murdered, knifed like a gangster's girl in a brawl!

But the Doc showed us. He turned her over and pointed out the gaping wound in her back. Then I remembered I was a reporter. I started for shore and a telephone.

I hurried into a pay-station telephone-booth. Naturally I didn't have a nickel. I was stumped for a minute, for I didn't want to wait to go get my money in my clothes in the cottage. Fortunately one of those curious guys came along. He knew that I had just come in from the float and knew what was wrong, and he willingly fed money into the slot as I talked. I gave the *Star* the main facts. I was told to stay on the job, and that some one would be sent out to cover the story. I'd expected that. No sooner does something really big break in my territory than they send out one of their regular men to cover it!

I went back to the beach. They had brought the body ashore; it lay on the beach covered with a sheet. They were waiting for the coroner or somebody. The chief of the beach policemen was in charge. I felt sorry for the guy. He can bawl you out if you park in the wrong place; he can even make small boys keep in line for a bathhouse—but murder was over his head. It was nothing he need to be ashamed of, for the Underwood murder turned out to be over the heads of some real smart cops.

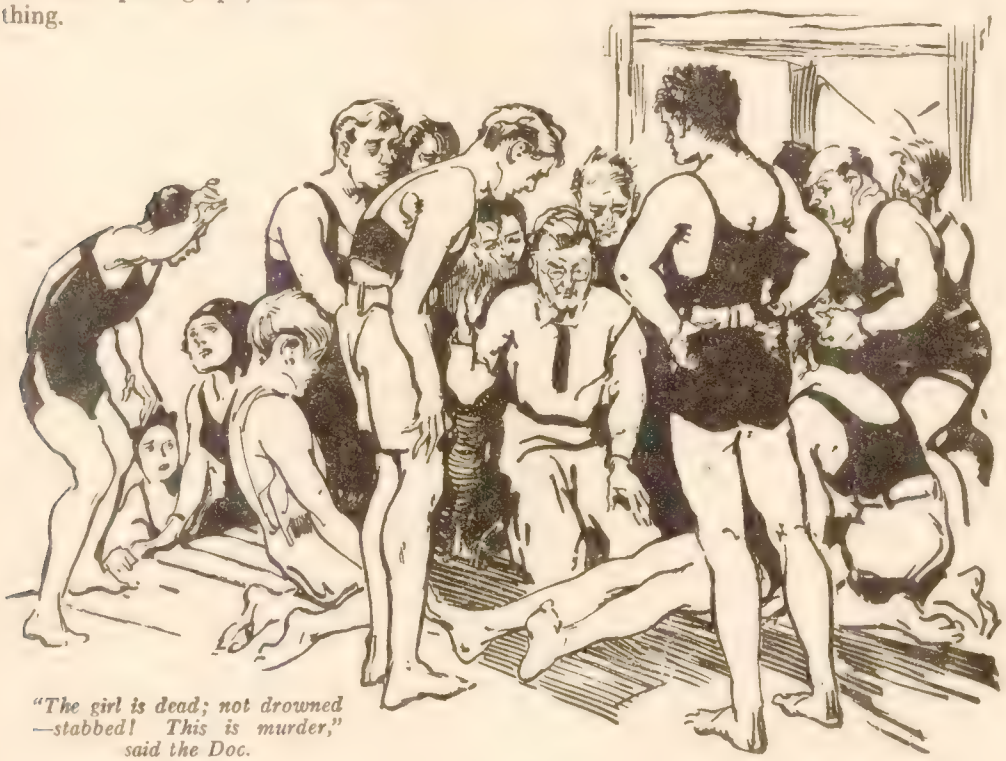
I WENT and got dressed and then telephoned the news to New Rochelle, to the paper there. They'd done me many a favor; here was a chance for me to return it. They said they would get a friend to break the news to the family. After that I went and sat down on the beach not far from the body, where I could see what went on.

It was strange how quickly the crowd faded away. Thousands of people there for a good time; along comes a tragedy like this, and their appetite for a good time was all gone. Those in the water came out, looked at the body there under the sheet, walked soberly to the bathing-houses, got dressed and went home. Not but what there was the usual quota of the morbidly curious. They crowded up as close to the body as the police would let them, but they were a very small minority.

As I sat there waiting for the coroner to come, for her folks to come, for the men from the *Star* to come, I got to thinking what a whale of a story this would be. The girl had been rich, good-looking, popular. Somebody in that crowd of thousands had croaked her. As I watched the crowd thin rapidly, I thought that the murderer could be miles away by now. He could even be away across the Sound over on Long Island if he went by boat. In a car he could be just anywhere. And suddenly I realized that there would be no fingerprints; at least I didn't think there would be, for the water would wash them away. Yes, I decided, this was going to be some mystery. I was right.

THE coroner came; her folks came. Gee, even if I am a reporter, I'm not hard-boiled, and the way her folks felt made me fairly sick. It's terrible to see folks in such awful trouble. I hated to have to ask her old man any questions, but of course I had to; the other men from the *Star* were not there yet. All he could tell me was that she had left home earlier in the afternoon with a friend, a man named Roy Reade. Her folks had heard nothing after that till they got word she was dead. Everybody wanted to know where this Roy Reade was. Nobody had seen him around the beach.

Her car was there, parked, but the man in charge of the parking space swore that she was alone when she drove in. The other men from the *Star* came along just then and took charge. They sent me to New Rochelle to dig up the routine facts about her: her parents, where she was educated, her latest photograph, and all that sort of thing.



"The girl is dead; not drowned —stabbed! This is murder," said the Doc.

Well, I don't need to tell you the case was a sensation. Her dad called in the smartest private detective he could lay his hands on. The county put their best men on it. In the next few days they all got just nowhere. About all they accomplished was to arrest this Roy Reade fellow. They pinched him in New London when he came into the harbor in his motorboat.

He wouldn't believe at first that the girl was dead. When they let him look at the New York papers and he could see that there was no doubt of that, he had to believe them. They got mighty little out of him, for all their grilling. He did admit that he and the girl had quarreled on the way to the beach. She dumped him out of the car, and he had to take the trolley to Greenwich, where his boat was in the harbor. He got aboard his boat and started on his two weeks' vacation exactly as he had intended when he left New Rochelle. It was just a happen-so that he came into New London. He had intended to keep on to Block Island or Newport.

His admitting that he had quarreled with the girl was all the public needed to decide that he was guilty. Most everybody thought the case was over. They arrested him and brought him to White Plains and landed him in jail. He stayed only long enough to prove that he was on his boat in Greenwich Harbor at the time the murder was done. The doctors had that doped out. They figured that the girl had been killed around four o'clock.

They had an inquest, a funeral, and they buried the poor kid, and they were no nearer knowing who killed her than they had been five minutes after her body was found. The men sent out from the *Star* were running around helpless, as were the other newspaper-men. I can't say that their plight hurt my feelings any.

I was as much at sea as anybody. It was an old guy I know who gave me my first hint. He runs a hot-dog stand on the road near White Plains. I was talking to him about the murder. That wasn't strange; everybody in Westchester County was talking about it.

"Buddy," he said to me, "I've lived some time and seen some queer things happen. This case that seems so mysterious isn't mysterious at all when you know the facts. The trouble is that you don't know them. You say there aint no clues. There must be if you know where to look. The guy aint born that wont leave clues when he does a murder. It don't stand to reason that some stranger up and killed her. It must be somebody who knew her well enough to want her out of the way. It usually is among the nearest and dearest that you find the murderer."

THERE was a lot of sense to that when you come to think it over. Perfect strangers don't murder you, unless it's a hold-up; this wasn't. You don't take money or jewelry into the water with you when you go for a swim. People you know, but not very well, don't get to dislike you to the extent to do you any harm. If they don't like you, they sheer off, and that's all there is to it. But folks that know you real well, you can annoy them to the point of frenzy. They can get so mad at you that they could kill you with a club and do it cheerfully. There sure was something to what that fellow said about "your nearest and dearest."

As I drove from White Plains to Yonkers, I kept thinking it over. The more I thought, the more sense there seemed to be in the idea. Suddenly I thought:

"Boy, this is your chance. You want to get into New York. You want to be a regular reporter. Find out who killed Rita Underwood, and the *Star* will give you anything you ask for."

When I was through work that day, I went down to the Rowing Club, got into a shell and rowed out into the Sound, where I could be alone. I wanted to think. I looked back at New Rochelle from the water. I couldn't see much of it—too many trees, and it is a sizable little city. Somewhere there, if my friend the hot-dog man was right, was the murderer of Rita Underwood. I lay on my oars and drifted and thought. I made a sort of plan. I would test this theory of "nearest and dearest." There would be no harm done if it got me nowhere.

As soon as I got back to the clubhouse, I took a fresh page of my notebook and headed it *N & D*. That didn't mean a thing to anybody but me. Under that heading I wrote "*Father*" and "*Mother*." I was sure of those two. She was an only child, so there were no brothers or sisters to list. I had an idea who her boy friends were, but I was going to be methodical and careful, and those two were enough to start with. Doc Whitely had told me that as near as the doctors could figure it, she had been killed at about four o'clock. My plan was to check up where her nearest and dearest were at four o'clock that day.

I didn't find it hard to find out where her father and mother were. After she went off in her car with Roy Reade, they went to the yacht club, boarded a friend's yacht and sailed across the Sound into Huntington Harbor. From two till after five they had been on board that yacht with their friends. They were out. I crossed off their names in my notebook with a sigh of relief. That was alibi enough for me, and I didn't relish the job of checking up on their movements. Remember, I had been at the beach when they arrived to claim the body, and if ever I saw two heartbroken people I saw them then.

I thought for some time about the next name to write down on my list. Roy Reade seemed to be the next in spite of the fact that he had been arrested and let go. So down went his name in my notebook.

In the newspaper game there is no time like the present. News is so liable to turn cold on you. I knew where this Reade fellow lived in Beechmount, and decided to see him that night. I stopped my car at the curb and walked in. I saw people on the porch and walked right up to them. I was confident and pretty chesty. Didn't I represent the New York *Star?* Sure I did, and that paper carries a lot of weight. Roy Reade was there, all right, sitting on the porch. I breezed right up to him and started my spiel. I was a reporter from the New York *Star;* could he give me a few minutes of his valuable time?

Usually people are only too glad to have the *Star* notice them and are pleased to be interviewed. But not this bird. He was about as amiable as a sore-headed bear.

He told me to get the hell out of there and do it damn' quick. Also not to come back.

I ask you what can a fellow do in a case like that? Exactly—that's what I did! I walked back to my car at the curb feeling like a whipped cur.

As I started the car with hands that trembled with rage, I was sure of only one thing. That was that I had just been talk-

ing to the murderer of Rita Underwood. I could have done a little murder myself just then—which proves that murders can be done by people you hardly know. I'd met this Reade just twice before.

AFTER that, I went home and to bed pretty well discouraged. My plan didn't look so good to me then. But one grand thing about life is that we don't stay down. The next day was fine and cool for a change, and I woke up feeling as if I could lick my weight in wild cats. I felt surer than ever that Roy Reade was guilty, but I decided to keep on with my plan.

I couldn't do anything more right away, for I had to cover my regular route. Things in Westchester County didn't stand still just because there had been a murder. That day I had to cover some gardens on swell private estates that were open for charity. So off I drove, just a little bit glad that I didn't have to keep on with my sleuthing. It was in the garden of a big estate at Purchase that I saw a girl I knew had been a chum of the Underwood girl. She was selling lemonade, and I drank enough lemonade to float a battleship, so that I could hang around and ask her questions.

I told her who I was. I wasn't chesty about it the way I was with Roy Reade. It had dawned on me that not everyone felt as I did about being a reporter. But this girl didn't mind; she seemed to be impressed. She seemed to think that being a newspaper-man, I knew heaps about the case the public didn't. As a matter of fact, at that exact moment we newspaper-men didn't know a thing that wasn't common property. I just looked wise and said that I was expecting startling developments within twenty-four hours. It was like taking candy from a kid to find out what I wanted to know. She gave me the inside dope on who was who among Rita Underwood's boy friends. There were only three that were really in the running: Roy Reade—I knew about him; a guy named Ted Rhodes; and George Barnes.

Ted Rhodes came from Montclair. After he developed such a crush on Rita Underwood, he moved to New Rochelle so as to be near her. George Barnes was a New Rochelle boy, a young lawyer. I had gone to school with him and met him frequently now, on the streets, in the courtroom at White Plains, which is the county seat, and at the different clubs I went to in my news-gathering. He was mixed up in politics. They said he wanted to run for the Assembly in the fall.

Rita had been very popular, but these three men were the ones that stood any chance with her. The girl told me:

"Why, last winter I would have sworn that she was engaged to Ted Rhodes. At Easter her mother gave a big luncheon for her in New York—a big affair. All through lunch I was expecting that the engagement would be announced. Nothing was said, but I'm sure I am right. At that time they were about ready to announce it. Lately I've not been so sure. One or the other of them cooled off. You couldn't tell, with a girl like Rita. But she hasn't gone around nearly so much with Ted the past two months, and some of our crowd thought she had turned him down."

I WAS eating up what she said. You can imagine how interesting all this was to me. I had dozens of questions I wanted to ask right on the tip of my tongue, when her mother bore down on us. She froze when she heard that I was a reporter. She didn't use unladylike language; she didn't have to. I got away from her and her daughter about as fast as I had from Roy Reade the night before, and feeling about as cheap. But I had two more names to add to my list.

That evening I hunted up my young lawyer friend George Barnes. His folks live down in Neptune Park. He was sitting on the porch looking sad and depressed. I was pretty sure of my welcome here. George is a friendly cuss. He may not get the nomination for Assembly this fall, but if he does, he will be elected.

I was shocked at the way he looked—haggard and old. This murder sure hit him an awful wallop. He was nice to me. We talked politics for a while. I tried to get up my nerve to ask him where he was at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon. Say, it wasn't easy. I could have asked a perfect stranger, but as it turned out I couldn't ask him. I'd have left without knowing, only he happened to mention that he was at the Wykfield Golf Club when he heard of the murder. That was enough for me. I knew the steward of the club well. Through him I could check up on when George had arrived and when he left. I muttered some excuse and got away and drove to the club.

On my way there I suddenly thought that George sure did look something fierce. Grief, I supposed; and then I wondered if

I knew there was some connection between that boat and the murder.

it could be remorse. He was hot-tempered: I knew that from the scraps he got in at school. Suppose he and his girl friend had a fight. It wouldn't be any ordinary quarrel, not with those two. She was used to having her own way; he was hot-headed. Could it be that he had killed her in a rage, and now was feeling bad about it?

The steward remembered that George had come to the Club at about five o'clock. He had ordered a dinner that he never ate, for some one telephoned him the news that Rita was dead. The steward was positive that it was after five when he reached the Club.

My heart sank. I wanted to get to the bottom of this, but I didn't want to believe George guilty. You see, I was his friend; I liked him. He acted as if he liked me, and it gave me a creepy, crawly feeling to go snooping into his affairs. Still, I couldn't shut my eyes to the facts. He certainly looked like the devil—and he had not reached the Wykfield Club till five or a little after on Sunday. He could easily have been at Rye Beach at four and got to the Club at the time he did.

I called it a day and went home. Before I went to bed I took out my notebook and added three names to my list of nearest and dearest: Roy Reade, Ted Rhodes and George Barnes. I put question-marks in pencil opposite two names, Roy Reade's and George Barnes'. I felt like a yellow dog when I marked George's name, but I was a newspaper man; I was out to solve the Underwood murder, and I made up my mind not to be squeamish. The question-mark after Roy Reade's name didn't worry me any, not after the way that egg had talked to me; but the one after George's did. I sighed and made up my mind to lay off George until I absolutely had to come back to him.

Next day I looked up this Rhodes fellow. I didn't find out much I didn't know, except where he worked. He was with the Stell outfit in Wall Street. I knew what that meant—big money. That firm is solid. There are bigger firms, and ones that you hear of oftener, but it was an old firm and carried weight. I didn't even know Rhodes by sight, though I had a hunch that he was the slick-haired sheik I had seen around with Rita Underwood. I was right.

I waited at the Inn till the bus brought him home from the station. He had patent-

leather hair and big cow eyes—the type that even sensible girls fall for at times. I also learned that he was a motorboat enthusiast and owned a peach of a boat called the *Grayling*.

I was in the city next day, and when I was through at the *Star*, I went on down to the Stell offices in Wall Street. I just wanted to look the ground over. The girl at the information-desk and switchboard was a peach. I parked in front of her and was giving her the once-over while she was busy on the phone. Right there I had my first bit of luck, my first break. About my second look, I discovered that the pretty girl was Kitty Archer from New Rochelle. We used to go to the same Sunday school when we were kids. I knew that she went to business, but I'd never known where. She did not know that I was on the *Star* until I told her. I could see she was impressed and that made me feel better.

KITTY told me what I had expected to be told, which was that Mr. Rhodes had gone for the day. She added that in a few minutes Miss Archer would be gone for the day. I asked her if she was going to catch the five-forty-two, and she said that she was. I asked if I could ride out to New Rochelle with her. She said I could if I'd wait a minute for her. Wait for her? Say, she was worth waiting for. I'd forgotten how pretty she was. I bought her a soda before we got in the subway, and we made the five-forty-two easy. I didn't ask her any questions at first, I was too busy renewing our acquaintance. I did steer the talk around to the Underwood murder and told Kitty what she didn't know: that I was one of those who found the body. That thrilled her to know some one who was on the inside of so sensational a case. We were drawing out of Pelham, the next stop to New Rochelle, when I said casually:

"This must hit young Rhodes pretty hard. I have it on reliable authority that he was engaged to her."

Say, Kitty went straight up. She turned on me like a tiger and blurted out:

"Don't you believe it! He was no more engaged to her than he was to me. He knows which side his bread is buttered, believe me! Why, his engagement to Helen Stell is going to be announced next Saturday."

The minute it was out, she was sorry. Seems that just as a nurse is not supposed to carry tales of the patients they nurse, so a Wall Street switchboard operator is not supposed to mention things they know from hearing them over the wire. A kind of your right hand not knowing what your left hand does. Kitty knew this, and she felt bad about what she had told me.

I WAS all excited inside. This was amazing news to me. Why, it pointed to a motive. No one had been able to dope out a motive up to now. I pacified Kitty the best way I could. I told her it was all right. She need not fear that I would quote her; but she was sure she had done wrong. I invited Kitty to go for a ride after dinner. I offered to take her up to Rye Beach and show her where it had happened. I could see that she was crazy to go, but she said, "No, thank you."

I had to leave it at that. But I was certainly glad that I'd met her. She'd given me a lot to think about. Not that my thinking did me much good. That night before I went to bed I put a question-mark opposite Rhodes' name in my notebook. Then I had three question-marks all in a row. They looked ridiculous. I had three suspects, and they couldn't all be guilty. Rivals in love may kill each other—that happens frequently; but I never heard of their joining together to kill their lady-love! I pitched the notebook away from me, turned out the light and went to bed. . . . .

There was the usual line of bunk in the newspapers next day. The *Star* was as bad as any of them. The police were expected to make an arrest at any moment. You know, the usual line of talk they hand out when they are stalling. In the *Clarion* there was an interview with some doctor about the weapon that was used. He said it was an unusual one—not a stiletto, or a butcher-knife as they had first thought, but something that retained the best features of both. The doctor was a foxy guy. He wouldn't commit himself except to say for publication that it was unusual. I read it, as I did every line I could find about the murder in any of the papers. That day it was off the first page for the first time since it happened. Yes, I thought, tomorrow it will be further inside, and in about next week it will join the list of unsolved murders.

I was walking along the street later that day when I saw a sign in front of a church. You know, one of these billboard effects to show that the church is as least as much of a go-getter as the local Chamber of Com-

merce. Lots of pep and eligible for the Boosters Club. The sign that day said something about a man with a lot of determination but a dull ax would get further than one with a sharper ax, but half-hearted in the way he swung it. I can't say so much for that brand of church advertising, but this sign gave me a lot of pep. "I'm about as determined as the next person!" I thought, as I stuck my jaw out.

I wanted to talk to Kitty; I thought she had some dope up her sleeve that I needed; besides, it was incredible how that kid had improved. She was mighty easy on the eyes, and it would be no hardship to have to see her. So that evening I drove around to her house and asked her to go for a ride to keep cool. She went with me all right, and without saying a word to her, I headed toward Rye Beach. I didn't say a word about the Underwood murder or the Rhodes fellow. We stopped at a roadhouse in Mamaroneck and danced. A bunch we know came along, and it was after midnight before we knew it. That upset my plans. I was sore. I wanted to take her to Rye Beach, and now, I supposed, it was too late. But she said it wasn't. It was such a hot night she wouldn't be able to sleep, anyway. She was game for a ride to the beach, a look around, and then home. All I said was: "Let's go."

It was nearly one o'clock when we got there. I took her down on the beach and showed her the float. Right away we saw the motorboat out by the float where we had found the body. It would circle the float and go out a short distance, and then come back and around the float. It sounds ridiculous to say that a motorboat acted sneaky, but that is the only way I can describe it. I touched Kitty's arm and motioned for her to watch it. There was no moon; we could not see very well, but that motorboat was certainly acting queer. The fact that it seemed bent on staying near the float made me suspicious. It was near that float that Rita Underwood's body had been found.

You know how the hair rises on a dog's back when it is mad? That's the way I felt. It wasn't a hunch; it was stronger than that: I knew there was some connection between that boat and the murder. I put my finger to my lips and drew Kitty down on the sand beside me. It was dark, and the boat was so far from shore that I felt sure we could not be seen, but I was taking no chances. That worked both ways; I couldn't see either, and suddenly I wanted to know the worst way what was going on out there by the float.

I knew there were some canoes a hundred yards or so up the beach; I whispered to Kitty an order to stay where she was and not to take her eyes off the boat. The way I went down the beach toward those canoes reminded me of the way I used to play Indian. I took advantage of every bit of cover there was. I got a canoe and muffled the paddle with a pair of bathing trunks that were drying on a rail by the pier. I sent the canoe silently back to where Kitty was waiting. In a whisper I asked her what had happened. Nothing, she told me. The boat was staying near the float, and the man was fishing for something.

When I told her I was going out there, she insisted on going with me. I told her tactlessly that she would be in the way, that it might be dangerous, that I wouldn't listen to it for a moment. She told me in a fierce whisper that she was going with me and that if I didn't consent, she would get up and walk down the beach in plain sight and spoil my chance of going. I had to give in. Then she suggested a plan. We were to be two lovesick kids out in a canoe, too absorbed in each other to know where we were going. We would run the canoe right up to the boat. If discovered, we were just two spooners. Covered with confusion, we would back off, but not till we had a look at the boat and the man on board.

SMART girl, Kitty; I would never have thought of that. We got in the canoe, and she snuggled up to me. I liked having her so near. We got nearly to the boat when the chap aboard hailed us and told us to sheer off. Kitty reached up and drew my face down to hers and just breathed: "Kiss me."

She didn't have to tell me twice. Our lips met, and I didn't have to act after that. Boy, oh, boy, that kiss thrilled me right down to my toes! I'd kissed other girls—not often, though I wasn't exactly a novice; but I'd never got such a kick before. The canoe struck the motorboat and nearly spilled us into the water before I dug the paddle into the water and sent her away. I was so fussed by the kiss that I didn't notice the boat closely, as I had intended. The man on the motorboat didn't waste any time. He started his motor and was gone in an instant. When I woke up to what was happening, there was only time

for me to try and make out the name on the stern. I thought it was the *Grayling* but I should have hated to have to say so in a court of law. Kitty was as upset as I was. In spite of the fact that she saw Rhodes every day in the office and heard his voice over the phone constantly, she could not be sure it was he. The fact that he beat it so quickly when we got too close confirmed my suspicions; but I had failed in what I started out to do. All on account of a kiss! I paddled back to shore, feeling foolish but absurdly happy. I was shy of Kitty, hardly dared look at her. Just as we grounded on the beach, the thought flashed through my head that Antony had some such experience with Cleopatra. I tell you kisses are dynamite sometimes.

It was one-thirty when I had the canoe back where it belonged. I thought I had better get Kitty home unless I wanted her mother to send out a general alarm. We were tongue-tied at first, but got talking about what happened, and the constraint wore off. We were both sure that we had stumbled on something important. I was positive that we were on the trail of the murderer. If it was the *Grayling* we had seen, that linked Rhodes to the murder. Kitty was as excited as I was. It was after two when I got her home. From the doorstep I thought she threw me a kiss, but I couldn't be sure.

NEXT morning I went to police headquarters in New Rochelle and found that George Barnes was with the Chief. There were other reporters there, and they were all excited, for it was rumored that Barnes flatly refused to account for his whereabouts on that Sunday afternoon. It was an even bet, they said, that he would be arrested. That upset me. I hung around till George came out. He looked worried and badgered. We got a statement from the Chief later. He admitted that George had been questioned, though he pooh-poohed the idea that he was suspected, but he didn't deceive anybody. I was so scared about Barnes that it was on the tip of my tongue to tell the Chief a few things and ask him to check up on Rhodes. I had a second thought and held my tongue. I was playing a lone hand except for Kitty. I'd keep on until they actually did arrest Barnes. When that happened, if it did, it would be time enough to act.

I went my rounds that day as if I was a sleep-walker. People who talked to me must have thought me absent-minded or dumb. All I could think of was the murder and my experience of the night before. I met the five-forty-two out of Grand Central station, and Kitty was on it as I had expected. I made a date with her for after dinner that night. We drove out past the Wykfield Club and turned off on the road that goes to Quaker Ridge, then into a side [illegible] and parked the car where we could talk. Just before I called for Kitty, I heard that some one higher up than the Chief had ordered the arrest of George Barnes. I told Kitty this. She knew how I felt about Barnes, and she was sorry. We just looked at each other in dismay. What could we do?

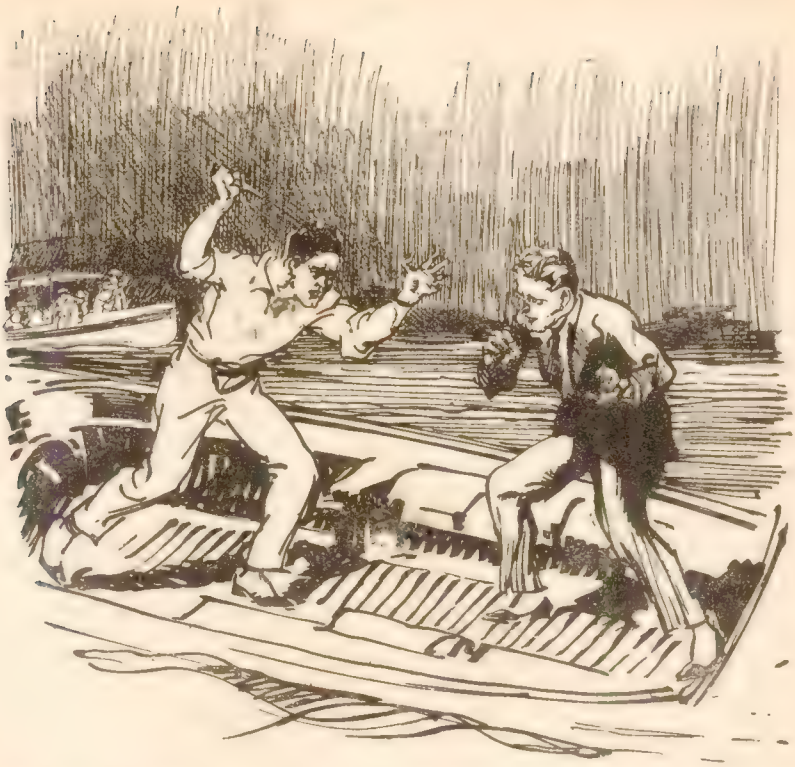
A car zoomed around the curve and shot by us. It was full of a lot of kids, girls and fellows of sixteen or eighteen. They laughed and yelled at us as they went by. They thought we were spooning. Neither of us cared; we hardly heard them, we were so puzzled and worried.

I have told you that Kitty is smart. She was the one to think of what we should do. She pointed out that we could go to the police. Perhaps it was our duty to do so, but that would kill any chance of a scoop for me. I couldn't tell the police and have an exclusive story for the *Star*. Kitty argued that Barnes was a lawyer; he was used to cases like this; he was in danger of immediate arrest. Why not go to him with what we knew and suspected? We had a job-lot of facts we didn't know the meaning of. If Barnes was as smart as I said he was, perhaps he could help us, and in helping us, help himself.

IN no time at all we were at Barnes' house. It is just as well we didn't meet a traffic cop; even my being on the *Star* wouldn't have saved us. I was out of my car and pouring my story into George's ears before he realized who I was.

"George, I have a straight tip that they are going to arrest you tonight for the murder of Rita Underwood. I know you are not guilty; I think I know who is; but if it is ever proved that this guy did it, I need your help. Will you listen to what a young lady who is out in my car has to tell you? And will you help us, and will you see that I get the story exclusive for the *Star* if I am right—as I'm certain I am?"

George looked a little dazed.



There was no mistaking his intention as he came toward me with that curious weapon in his hand.

"You think you know who is guilty? That's more than the detectives working on the case do. Mr. Underwood told me tonight that they were as much at sea now as they ever have been."

"But George, I know a lot of things that nobody else does. The trouble is that I can't make sense of them. Kitty, that is the young lady out in the car, says that you are a lawyer, and they might make sense to you."

"It is barely possible," George said. He wanted me to bring Kitty into the house. I kicked on that.

"A cop may come to arrest you before we have a chance to talk this over. The tip I have is straight. They are going to pinch you. Maybe not till tomorrow morning, but I wont gamble on that. Jump into my car, and we can go some place else to talk."

George thought a moment and then suggested an empty house on Davenport Neck. He was attorney for the estate that owned it. It was set way back from the road, and once there, we were not likely to be seen or overheard. I pulled him toward the car and pushed him in. I drove straight to Davenport Neck and was careful not to be seen when we turned into the place. Barnes led us to a rustic summerhouse that overlooked the water. The place was old-fashioned and had cupolas and a summerhouse. No iron dogs on the lawn, though. It was not that old-fashioned.

AT first we all talked at once. That didn't suit George. He made us stop and begin again. He asked so many questions that you would have thought we were in court. We must have talked for an hour. He explained to us why he was mum about Sunday. He was patching up a family row for a client. To tell where he was would spill the beans. Then George said: "I think you are on the right track. The family and the authorities are greatly in your debt. I think that Mr. Underwood should hear what you have told me. Will you get him, Bob?"

Of course I was willing. Barnes told me not to take my car, but to walk to the trolley, and to bring Mr. Underwood back with me. I was to tell him nothing, just bring him back with me. I followed instructions.

A private detective named Clinton was with him, and when he got an inkling of what was up he asked Mr. Underwood to include him. Mr. Underwood was so nervous that he could not drive his car. He let me do it.

When we got back to the house, Kitty and I repeated our story for them. It was

nearing midnight when we finished. Barnes turned to Mr. Underwood, asking abruptly:

"You don't suppose he was fishing for the weapon, do you?"

Now, that had never occurred to me, but the instant Barnes said it, something clicked in my mind. Certainly, that was it. He killed her, dropped his weapon and just had to go back, fearing that the cops would think to look for it!

I turned to look at the *Grayling* at her anchorage near the Yacht Club. I stared and stared, for the *Grayling* was gone. I had seen it earlier from the summerhouse, but none of us had seen it go.

I was just going to say something when Barnes went on: "If he dropped his weapon, he would be anxious to get it back. Do you suppose that explains his presence near the float last night?"

George wasn't sure. He was just thinking out loud. But the detective, Clinton, only needed that hint. He clapped Barnes on the shoulder.

"You said a mouthful, fella. We've all been blind. Sure, he was fishing for the weapon. It must be something special, something that would be recognized, not just any old knife. Did this Rhodes own a big knife or a dagger that you know of?"

George looked at the detective sharply. He leaned toward him and held out his hand.

"That's strange that you should think of that.. Do you see that scar?"—pointing to his thumb. We couldn't; it was too dark. "That scar was made by a knife, a paper-knife that is the property of Rhodes. No, we didn't have a fight. It was last winter. Rita had a little bridge-party—four tables, I think; just our crowd. She prided herself on having unusual prizes." He looked inquiringly at Mr. Underwood who nodded his head. "Rhodes and I tied for first place. The prize was a knife, a queer-looking knife that she had picked up in one of those rummage-sale shops they have for charity. It looked as if it had a history. Well, we cut for the prize, and Rhodes won. I was curious about the prize I had lost, and picked it up to examine it. It was sharper than any paper-knife has a right to be. I cut my thumb so badly that I had to leave and go to my doctor."

We looked from one to the other, and Mr. Underwood quavered:

"Then you think that Rita was killed with a knife she gave Rhodes?"

Barnes nodded his head. We all gasped. It was dreadful to think the poor girl had provided her murderer with his weapon.

Clinton spoke up: "Then that's what he was fishing for last night."

"And what he is fishing for again tonight," I said. "The *Grayling* has left the harbor."

That remark of mine started something. They all looked and made sure that I was right; then they got busy. Clinton took charge. He got a launch and some of his men, and in twenty minutes we left the Yacht Club. I had barely time to telephone the *Star* to expect a big story. They wanted to know what was up. I couldn't resist telling them:

"I'll have the story of the Underwood murder for you before the night is over!" And I hung up quickly. I didn't want to hear again that I was to wait for some other *Star* reporter.

Clinton was all right except for one thing: he was no sailor, and the launch he got was a slow old tub. That proved important later—nearly cost me my life, in fact; but on the way to Rye Beach all I could think of was that it was slow, dead slow. Kitty was along. No one objected, though it was hardly an expedition for a girl. We were in search of a murderer, and there might be danger.

Clinton ordered lights out when we got near Rye Beach. We turned toward shore, and we all strained our eyes to see if there was a motorboat near the float. There was, and in my eagerness I went to the bow of our launch, and was standing there when we ran alongside. I saw at once it was the *Grayling;* and without thinking, I jumped aboard her. Rhodes was leaning over to start his boat and looked up and snarled at me. With a roar the motor started, and we were off.

THE hired launch was no match for Rhodes' boat, and it was left behind as if it were tied to the float. In a minute or so we were twenty yards away and widening the gap between the two boats every second. As he came toward me, I saw that it was Rhodes, all right. I also saw that his fishing-trip had been successful this time, for in his hand he held a weapon, half knife, half dagger. There was no mistaking his intention as he came toward me with that curious weapon in his hand. He had done one murder with it; he was evidently ready to do another. I yelled

for help and looked despairingly at the widening gap between me and the launch. It was doing its best but was hopelessly outclassed. Clinton stood up in the launch and fired, but his shots went wide. I had about decided to dive overboard and swim for the launch, but before I could dive, Rhodes grappled with me.

In high school I played on the basket-ball team. That's a rough and tumble for you. Some of the other high-school teams we played with were dirty players. Anything to win, you know. I'd learned some of their tricks. Lucky thing I had, for one of them came in handy now. I tripped Rhodes, and we fell together, and I fell on the knife. I felt it jab my thigh. Rhodes fell underneath and cracked his head on the gunwale as he fell. He took the count—was out, lay still. I saw he was all in; I staggered over and shut the motor off. Then I must have fainted. They found us both unconscious when they drew alongside. Kitty saw the blood and thought I had been killed.

When I opened my eyes again, my head was in Kitty's lap, and Rhodes was handcuffed and conscious, but groggy. They gave me first aid; fortunately it was only a flesh-wound, and except for loss of blood, I was O. K.

WELL, they had the goods on him. They found the *Grayling* equipped with an electro-magnet. That's what he went fishing for the knife with. It was steel, and he had at last picked it up from the bottom. They all said I deserved a break and a chance to score a beat. They agreed to put me ashore at Rye Beach and then go on with their prisoner to New Rochelle. I would have the news that much ahead of any other newspaper-man. Kitty went with me. Before we left the launch, they got a confession out of him. There was no fight left in him. They warned him that anything he said would be used against him, but he was past caring. . . . . In the winter he and Rita had been secretly engaged. He plunged into speculation, as he knew he would need a lot of money. He lost. He stole from his firm and used the money to try and regain his losses. He lost again. He got cold feet and saw only one way out. Old man Stell was hardly likely to send his son-in-law to jail. He switched his attentions and tried to ditch Rita. She was wise to him and threatened to expose him.

She was wild—you know, a woman scorned. Mrs. Stell and her daughter were all ready to announce the engagement. He had to shut Rita's mouth. He arranged to meet her at Rye Beach; he was spending the week-end at the Stells' place near by. She swam out to his motorboat. He pleaded in vain. She started to swim back to shore, vowing that she would dress and drive to the Stells' and expose him. He swam after her, dragged her under water near the float and stabbed her. Then he swam to his boat and went back.

But the lost knife worried him; he had tried to fish it up on several nights. Kitty took his confession down in shorthand on paper I tore from my notebook. Then she made a copy of it in longhand for Clinton, and Rhodes signed it and two of us witnessed it.

Then they put us ashore, Kitty and me, and the launch turned toward New Rochelle. Kitty helped me into a telephone-booth, and I talked to the *Star*. They were not sure at first that I was on the level, but once sure of that, they ate up what I had to tell them.

No, I didn't write the story that beat the town by two hours. Another guy did that, but the way they played up my part in it made me blush when I read it. From the telephone-booth I went in a taxi to the hospital, Kitty right with me all the time. After they fixed me up there with a proper bandage, I went to police headquarters to see if I could get an interview with Rhodes and score another beat.

I GOT the beat, but it wasn't what I expected. The police owed me a lot and knew it, so they let me in to Rhodes. I found him dead in his cell. He had strangled himself with his belt!

I went out on the run and dragged the amazed Kitty into another telephone-booth while I poured this story into the ear of the *Star's* night city editor. Two scoops in one evening is going some for any reporter.

I hung up and staggered to my feet. I was so tired that I reeled, and Kitty caught me in her arms. As I leaned against her, all in, I thought fast. If the *Star* gave me a nice raise, as they were almost certain to do, if I asked her a certain question, if—

I must be psychic or something. I've been that way ever since I was a kid; for as I thought of all those *if's*, I knew inside me that the answer to the question I meant to ask Kitty would be, "Yes."

The Dark Forest

The White Man's burden in the Orient is a very real thing—as witness this fascinating story.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"THREE more Sakai visiting cards today, gentlemen! These were picked up in Section D." Sam Overton, manager of Plantation Sixty-two, produced three sinister, dark objects, like knitting needles, made from the midrib of the black palm leaf. Their tips were gray with a gummy substance, at which the other two white men at the table looked with apprehension. They were darts from the Sakai blowgun, which said *Pit!* at you from the depths of the jungle—and then you died, of the gum-*ipoh* poison on the tip. And not pleasantly, either.

The three white men were in starched cotton dinner-jackets, clinging desperately to their sanity and poise by that device of civilization. They perspired in streams from the nerve-destroying heat. The three Malay servants who stood like statues behind each, glistened frankly, though a brown punkah waved solemnly overhead in the big airy dining-room of the main bungalow. Outside was jungle night, breathless, suffocating in the prodigious heat, the waters of the Upper Jelai flowing by silently and with promise of coolness—but they all knew it was too warm and too full of crocodiles to bathe in.

Sam knew that his two assistants were at the breaking-point. They snapped at each other when they did talk. They had a rule that whenever anyone said anything unbearable, the aggrieved party would shut up like a man, leave the table, and take a turn around the veranda until he got a grip on his temper again. The other fellow said nothing, neither apologized nor mentioned the subject again that evening.

That rule was needed now, for in answer to the manager's announcement about the darts, Jim Brett, a heavy, lumpish man in charge of plantation machinery, growled out at Dedham, the young Englishman in charge of burning and planting: "Yah! Trust the English to grab all the best land in this God-forsaken colony! We're too far up the Jelai, chief! Might as well knock off and go home!"

DEDHAM looked at him grimly. It was unjust, that reference to his countrymen. The English planters *did* have all the best land in Pahang, of the Malay Federated States; but the Americans were latecomers. The reason United Rubber had acquired this plantation cheap was just because it was located on the very edge of the Sakai country, those wild jungle-dwellers of the main mountain range of the Peninsula. No Chinese coolies could be hired to stay here and work the plantation. The Malay village on the Upper Jelai that furnished the labor was almost as primitive as the Sakai themselves. It had its Datu, one Mat Tombak, who was supposed to police this district in lieu of native constabulary. It had supplied one jewel of a native foreman, Si Ular, who was a character. Otherwise the help was indolent, stupid, un-

reliable, and apparently engaged in an endless feud with the wild Sakai of the hills.

United Rubber had bought the plantation for a song, its English owners having given up the game. It had four sections of eight-inch trees fifty feet tall already being tapped; a mechanical plant of crêpe rolls, smoke-shed, and a wheezy steam engine that about wore Brett out; and plenty of good land that Dedham was clearing and setting out in new rubber seedlings. Trouble was, the Sakai seemed to object to the whole thing. They were saying so with darts from the tangled jungle, shot at the rubber-tappers as they worked. The plantation had lost six people to these darts so far. Many more were misses, and the darts were picked up and brought to the manager with salaams and almond eyes that looked at him silently asking when he was going to do something about it. Otherwise, "man-man no do work in this-here," as Si Ular put it.

Dedham glowered at Brett for a full minute and was about to take his turn around the veranda, but caught Sam's eye on him. He shrugged his shoulders and tugged viciously at the little wispy tow mustache on his lip, then said: "Eight more trees in Section A cut clear through to the cambium, sir. Odd, but I can't seem to get my blighters to use the scoring-tools properly. Wish we had Chinese."

"It's more than odd!" affirmed Overton. He was a big, quiet and shrewd man, his voice a harsh but cheerful growl. Brown-eyed, tall and lanky, a sailor and a yachtsman at heart, hailing from the eastern end of Long Island—but family connections owning large blocks of United Rubber stock had sent him out to Malaya to run No. 62. Shipping, supplies, wages, accounts—these were supposed to be his province; but he soon learned that a manager's job out here was fully occupied in keeping the plantation going at all. There were his two assistants, on edge and at sword's-points with each other. There was Mat Tombak, the native Datu, who did not seem to be up to his job of discouraging the wild Sakai. And there was the mystery surrounding this whole attempt at a white man's industry, why the Sakai were picking on United Rubber 62, why grown trees were being ruined by too deep cutting, why Brett was having trouble with broken roller gears, hot engine-bearings, and torn smoke-house nets. Sam himself was growing nervous because of it all. But if he blew up, the whole plantation would fail, and the jungle would reclaim it within a year. Another drop in United Rubber stock!

"*I* think, sir, it's time to call on Kwala Lipis for constabulary," declared Dedham, looking at the darts beside Overton's plate as the curry course was being served. "This Datu's no good! He's not getting on with our Sakai friends, *is* he? If the Governor would give me ten good Sikhs, I'd run the lot over the hills into Perak where they belong, I would!"

Brett snapped: "How long would they stay there? Once the constabulary are withdrawn, back they come! —That last lot of acetic acid in the coagulating pans is rotten stuff, sir," he said in reply to Overton's address, having disposed of Dedham's remedy in one breath.

THE young Englishman's gray eyes flared, but he sat tight and said nothing. Those two, it seemed, never could agree on any possible subject. Brett was the process engineer, sticking close to his machinery and chemicals; Dedham was the field overseer, gangs of Malayan men, women, and children under him burning and clearing the jungle for new sections, tapping and collecting rubber latex in the older groves, planting out seedlings from the nursery as fast as new land was cleared. He would like nothing better than a rough-and-tumble campaign with the wild Sakai. But that was not the solution, Overton felt; it would only mean more reprisals later.

That word *reprisals* stuck in Sam's mind as he growled out a cheerful pacifier at the two belligerents. And with it it seemed the solution had come. "Brett's right, Dedham," he said. "We'll have to run our own war. We appeal to the Governor, and maybe he sends us a squad of soldiery and a corporal. That would be the last we'd see of any Sakai—until the Sikhs were gone back to Kwala Lipis. Then they'd be at us again—same old thing. . . . . Now, my idea is that we are mixed up in a native intrigue here. Some one wants to keep the Sakai continually hostile but would hate to see them driven off entirely. Some one wants our producing groves to die off, but very gradually, just a few trees ruined now and then—they are a long time growing! And some one wants our machinery plant laid up for repairs half the time."

Dedham bristled. "Meanin', sir, that the English planters of Pahang would stoop to treachery of that sort with an American concern?"

"Oh, shut up, Dedham!" Overton scoffed. "You're too touchy about your precious compatriots! England and Holland between them own most of the world's crude rubber, but we're coming on. This very corporation has plants all over Sumatra, and not a few right here in the M.F.S. And we've no idea your people would do us any dirt. . . . . No; it's stupider and more primitive than that. Some native has a motive here, and a fantastic one, you can bet! And that native is—"

HE paused. The Malay servants stood like sweating brown images of bronze, each in his shouting turban of plaid and silver-and-gold thread, each in a scarlet sash and a violent sarong covering his naked legs to the knees. They wore white *bajus,* or jackets, as a concession to white men. But underneath they were as scarred and oily and generally primitive as anyone in the Datu Mat Tombak's village. And they had ears.

"Well, we'll think it over a bit," he went on. "These persistent Sakai bushwhackings are reprisals for *something;* that's the cue. Otherwise I see no reason why they should be picking on us. We've done them no harm—and certainly the Datu has not!"

He laughed at that quirk, and the others with him. It relieved the tension somewhat. Dedham puzzled over his trees with less fretfulness. "They're all such frightful liars, Chief! Each man swears he cut no deeper than I showed him how with the scoring tool. Most of 'em are women and boys, but you go out and look at those cuts! Right through the cambium. We'll lose 'em sure!"

"How about a night prowl in those sections?" offered Overton. "Maybe some one else than our own people is doing it."

"By Jove, sir!" exclaimed Dedham. It seemed an entirely new thought to him, and he was happy, now, with something ahead to try out. Overton went out after dinner on an errand of his own. . . . . Dedham, Brett—he shook his head: neither of them deep enough for this situation. Brett was a mere lump; you would do well if you kept him from quitting and going home. And Dedham—the happy-go-lucky young Briton, muddling along in the good old way, not an idea beyond what lay right under his nose! No; what he needed was a counselor, some one with a shrewdness and subtlety matching his own, who would get to the bottom with him of this obscure motive that Sam felt was the single source of all their difficulties. And he would find that counselor in Si Ular, the Malay general foreman of the plantation. He was a bold, audacious, domineering dog, with a wonderful vocabulary of pidgin English—a mighty liar, but invaluable in handling the hundred-odd natives who worked the plantation.

Sam crossed the sandy square of the native village overhung with cocoa palms on his way to Si Ular's house. The square thatched roof of the mosque to one side, the communal grove of areca-nut palms for betel-chewing fronting the other, two godowns and the Corporation wharf on the river front, then a straggling row of tall-peaked thatched houses on piles out over the river; such was the typical Malayan scene. He climbed a ladder to the veranda of one of the largest of these, passed through a dark room smelling of sweet vegetable scents, and came out on the platform overlooking the river. Si Ular squatted there, smoking, his sampan idling below tied by a coir rope to a pile.

"Tabek, ya Si Ular!" Sam greeted the motionless figure. *"U walieka salaam, ya Tuan Besar!"* returned Si Ular courteously. It was unprecedented, this visit of the big boss; but his tone gave no sign as he turned his hard, almond-eyed brown face and touched palm to forehead.

SILENCE, for a time. Then: "Owing to perspiring climate, man-man no do work tomorrow, Tuan," said Si Ular by way of report. It was a manifest lie, a subterfuge, an evasion, for no Malay minded the heat! Sam knew they were scared because of the unseen Sakai dart and would lay off until something decisive was done.

"Shootings is more and more, Tuan," said Si Ular presently.

"Aiwa!—and for that am I come. *Why* is shootings, Si Ular?"

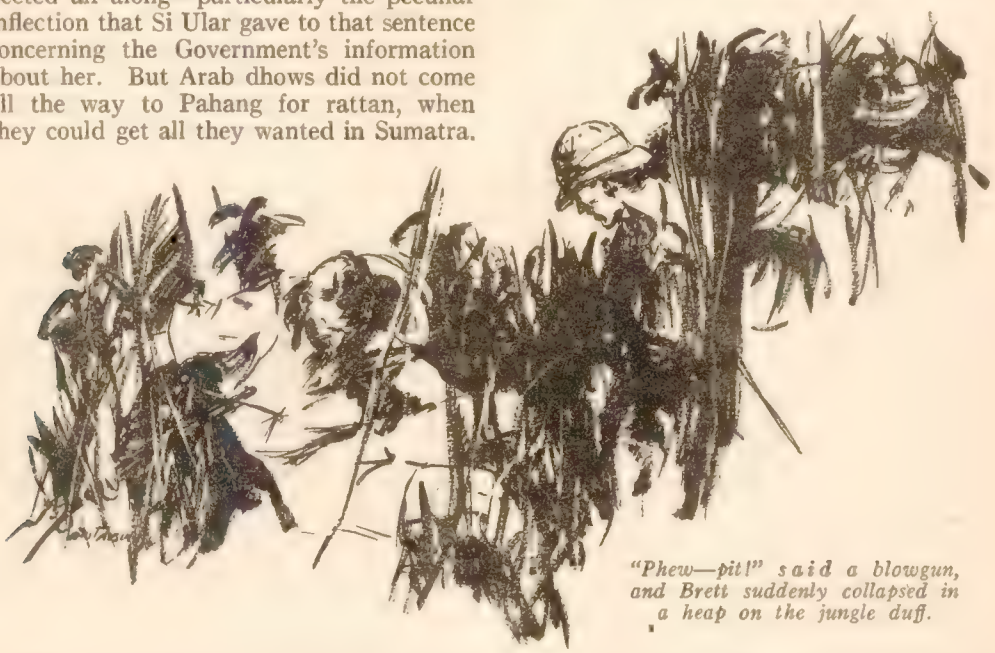
A direct question like that is offensive to the Malay temperament. Si Ular shrugged his bare brown shoulders and remarked: "The river flows!"—the indifferent Malay equivalent of, "Who knows?"

It was exasperating to Sam, but he knew how to deal with his natives. Si Ular knew the reason. You would get it out of him if you were indirect enough. "The Sakai are but poor dogs of the jungle," he observed. "There is no gain in shooting down women and children. Therefore one shoots for revenge."

Si Ular nodded gravely. "There is an

Arab dhow from Zanzibar lying in a bend below Kwala Lipis, Tuan." He vouchsafed that information apparently in connection with nothing in particular. "It is known to the Government that she takes on rattan," he added with a faint sneer.

Sam jumped, caught his breath with a low growl of indignation. The innocent words had revealed a thing that he had suspected all along—particularly the peculiar inflection that Si Ular gave to that sentence concerning the Government's information about her. But Arab dhows did not come all the way to Pahang for rattan, when they could get all they wanted in Sumatra.



"Phew—pit!" said a blowgun, and Brett suddenly collapsed in a heap on the jungle duff.

"Slaves?" he asked. "But it is not permitted. Yea, heavy is the hand of the white government upon offenders, Si Ular! Thou knowest our Governor."

"*Aiwa!* A good man, and wise. But sampans go down the river at night, and who shall know if there be bound Sakai slaves in their bottoms?"

"You mean," barked Sam energetically, "that Mat Tombak is engaged in it? The damned old hypocrite!"

Si Ular looked at his excited boss curiously. "What is it to thee, Tuan? Our people have hunted the Sakai since always. There is much-much money paid for slaves. *Aiwa!* And too many Sakai in the jungle likewise."

"But," retorted Sam in astonishment, "the plantation! If we hunt the Sakai—or our Mat Tombak for us—*of course* they will retaliate by shooting at us as we work! This must stop, Si Ular!"

"And who shall stop the war chief, Tuan?" objected Si Ular. "Denounce him to the Governor, and thou hast an enemy and a tissue of lies. For nothing can be proved on him. But tomorrow the dhow leaves for Africa," he added with a curious accent of provocation in his tones.

"Where are Mat Tombak and his young men right now, Si Ular?" demanded Sam with a grim fury in his voice.

"Allah knows!" said Si Ular indifferently. "Up-river, perhaps. A last lot of slaves, taken in a night attack on the Sakai settlements. Or perhaps he is at your trees, Tuan. He wants your plantation to die, but to be a long time dying!"

With an effort Sam restrained himself. The impersonal attitude of the Malay was difficult for an Anglo-Saxon to put up with, but it did no good to fret at it. Here was Si Ular, general foreman, viewing the ambitions of the pernicious Mat Tombak as if he had no loyalty due this plantation that gave him his bread and butter, as something apart from his own responsibilities, but something academically interesting—as how well Mat Tombak managed in keeping his slave-trade flourishing right under the nose of the white government! Periodic expeditions that kept the Sakai in a frenzy of revenge; ruined trees that would yet be a long time yielding latex sap; the machinery too, with its numerous breakdowns!

Sam gestured forcefully with clenched fist. "We spike *this* game right off, tonight, Si Ular! Know you a tame Sakai who can guide us to their jungle settlements?"

"*Aiwa*—lo, the old crone in your kitchen, Pé-Uish, Tuan. She is a Sakai slave to To Dayong, only thou didst not know. Many years ago was she taken—but they never forget their jungle craft. . . . . And what wilt thou do, Tuan Besar?"

"*Do?*" barked Sam. "Rout her out and go there right off! Then, when Mat Tombak and his crowd arrive for a battle, he'll find three white men on the Sakai side! And we take him red-handed, where no lies will avail before the Governor!"

He paused to learn Si Ular's judgment on that plan evolved in the excitement of the moment. The general foreman considered, but he shook his head ever so slightly. "Hast thou a village of Sakai huts in mind, Tuan?" he asked. "Nay, they are but sorry savages, owning nothing but their weapons and shelters built of leaves, to be abandoned in a day. And they would flee before you in more terror than before Mat Tombak. Catch a Sakai in his jungle—as well try to milk a goat into a sieve!"

"Nay, but the old woman," persisted Sam. "Let her call to them in their own tongue, telling them who we are and why we are come. And make haste, ya Si Ular! This matter is naught unless we are there before Mat Tombak and his war party."

"Verily the plan has merit, Tuan," agreed Si Ular after more consideration. "Yea, the Sakai know gratitude! Oppressed and hunted they have been, always; nor does the white government do aught for them except forbid the slave-hunting by my people. But white men with guns actually taking their part—it may be that thee and thine will be sacred to the Sakai after that!"

"Hope so!" said Sam cheerfully. His affairs had brightened with this prospect of putting a sudden end to the plantation's incubus of fear. It was audacious in the extreme, this plan of a bold push into the hills by night, seeking the Sakai encampment and forestalling the Malay raid on that same encampment. The white party, however, would quite likely be ambushed and slain by the poisoned dart and the bamboo lance for their pains. For like most animals, the wild Sakai regarded benefactors and oppressors alike as enemies. If that old crone could first get in touch with her people—

"Wear thy heaviest boots, Tuan," warned Si Ular. "Every trail will be planted with sharp bamboo spikes bearing poison. Thus do the Sakai slay those who would attack them before ever they come near."

"All the better!" retorted Sam. "We can go fast along the trails while Mat Tombak is forced to work through the jungle. And thou?"

"I come with thee, Tuan. None of our young men must know. Is not the ambition of each to go slaving with the Datu when able to bear a weapon? The custom of the slave-hunt is ancient with us, Tuan. We hear that the Government forbids, but we do not understand the order." Thus naïvely Si Ular explained the village sentiment. To hunt Sakai was an act of merit; if the plantation suffered from reprisals, that was none of their affair!

SAM arrived back at the bungalow more cheerful than in months and entirely in command of the situation. It had been arranged that Pé-Uish, the old kitchen crone and former Sakai slave, should meet them some distance up-river in a sampan borrowed from a village friend. No one in the village would connect an old woman going somewhere in a canoe with any raid of white men into the jungle, Si Ular had argued. He himself would guide the Tuan Besar, and such of the young tuans as might care to come along, and all would embark in the sampan so as to penetrate far into the jungle, swiftly and by night. Then there would be trails that Pé-Uish would know.

Well, they learned more that night about *ipoh* poison than is pleasant to know! Two hours of paddling up the dark, wicked river overhung with bamboo and enormous forest growth, a rapid that had to be carried around; then they were in the heart of the hills. Pé-Uish barked and grunted her satisfaction in the queer, jerky monosyllables of her people, a language that is scarce human—one that cannot count above three. She seemed to remember the lay of the land, for without hesitation she told Si Ular to disembark at the foot of a fearful rapids.

The roar of the waterfall some distance farther up the gorge—a waterfall that no white man had ever seen—sounded loud and menacing in the still night. It argued that thus far and no farther up a sampan might go. They were in the heart of the Sakai country, the back jungle never visited by Malays and traversed by but one white man's road, the motor-lorry trail over Semangko Pass to Penang. Here lived a people little above the apes in civilization, jungle prowlers who feared but one beast, the tiger; and who hated the Malays, as

well they might, for centuries of slave-raiding had been their sole contact with them.

Pé-Uish led the way up a ravine, with Sam's party following her in single file. They were but four. Dedham, the impetuous and combative, was at Sam's back, armed with his pet double rifle. Then came Brett, pessimistic and uneasy. He had objected from the first that the Sakai would treat their would-be benefactors exactly as would a savage creature that you try to release from a trap—bite the rescuing hand. Sam himself was not so sure that it would not turn out just that way. A single discharge of darts would lay the whole party low! And there would be no warning from this tangled jungle.

"I go before when we reach the village," said Pé-Uish. She led on through blackness that seemed all impenetrable leafage.

Suddenly Pé-Uish stopped and croaked something in a low whisper to Si Ular beside her. The foreman turned. "Her people are all about us in the dark, Tuan Besar. It is not well to move farther!"

THE reaction to that announcement was typical in the three white men. Sam raised his rifle slowly to a snap-shot poise. A soft metallic click came from Dedham's double rifle as he set its safety off. Brett actually threw his gun to shoulder, peering this way and that into the tangled bush, his breath hoarse with fear, his heavy features contorted. But they were all utterly helpless, come what might!

The loud call of the argus pheasant rang out startlingly. Pé-Uish had made it, an almost perfect imitation of the original. It was her call to her unseen people. Sam listened to its reverberations in the hills, scarce believing that the old woman in front of him could be the author of it. It was about three in the morning, though, and no real bird called at this hour.

Silence. There was no reply, no answering call, nothing that would tell that there were living men all about them in this black sea of glistening leaves. Sam's optimism faded. Brett was right, after all; it was utterly hopeless to attempt anything, beneficent or otherwise, with these people! Their only contact with strangers was to kill. He knew that they would not even meet the Malays to trade the wild rubber and rattan that they gathered. They left it in a certain spot, and came back later for the rice and salt left in exchange.

Presently a series of barks and grunts quavered out into the night from old Pé-Uish. She was telling her people who they were and why the Tuan Besar had come. Si Ular translated in low tones.

For answer a single scornful croak sounded in the black depths; and then, *"Phew—pit!"* said a blowgun and Brett suddenly collapsed in a heap on the damp jungle duff.

Medical men tell us that the action of *ipoh* poison is peculiar in that it paralyzes instantly all the striped muscles of the body except the heart. It leaves the smooth muscles alone, so that the victim still lives, but is finished off by a thrust of the bamboo spear. Sam knew this much about it, and prepared for a rush by the unseen Sakai around them. If they once broke through, the rifles could talk.

But Pé-Uish had called out reproachfully, and no rush came. Sam breathed more freely. But the situation was still desperate. The Sakai would not believe her tale of mercy. The idea that white men would come in the night to fight on their side against the Malays was too utterly foreign to any conception *they* had of strangers to be grasped at all! Everything depended on her persuasion now. And then suddenly she was gone, and they were left alone, just the three! Si Ular, who was rumbling curses on all Sakai under his breath; Sam, who had given up hope but did not show it; and Dedham, who stood fast grimly.

"Sit tight, Chief!" his mutter came flinty in Sam's ear. "She'll win 'em over, or she wont. What's the odds? We've done *our* bit."

He was squatting low, arms folded over his rifle, and helmet jammed down as far as it would go on his head. Little as possible exposed to the deadly dart seemed to be the idea, and Sam imitated him. There was nothing to do anyhow but wait. To get up and run would be fatal. Brett lay gasping near them, but little could be done for him. They knew of no antidote to the effects of *ipoh*.

And then, in a way, Providence intervened, for at that moment a distant reverberation sounded up the valley of the Jelai, thrice repeated. It was the famous *sorak*, or Malay battle-yell, and came from Mat Tombak and his young men to let the Sakai know that the hunt was on after them. It always caused a stampede in the jungle people, a breaking of fresh trails of escape that were easier to follow than their habitual runways.

It had the same reaction now, for there were rustlings in the bush, alarmed and barbarous calls to one another, the voice of some chief giving orders. Then the sounds crackled off through the bush, and Sam and his party were utterly alone.

"He comes, in the mercy of Allah!" said Si Ular relievedly. "Mat Tombak and his warriors, Tuan! And with them is a tame Sakai called Po-Ut who will track these dogs of the bush till all are taken. Is it not well that we join arms with them?"

HE looked significantly at Brett, as evidence of what already had happened in their attempts to establish contact with the Sakai. But Sam turned on him fiercely.

"Nay, thou mountain of swineflesh!" he belabored the foreman in the vernacular. "The very thing we came to prevent! And would you have us join them *now*, only to provoke yet more reprisals? Oh, Lord!" He stamped his foot vexedly. You could not make Si Ular see that Mat Tombak was anything but a blessing in ridding the woods of its Sakai population.

"Listen, thou!" growled Sam forcefully. "Words they will not believe, but actions they must! We follow, and we take part in this slave-hunt of Mat Tombak's. On the Sakai side, just as I planned. I but wait for Pé-Uish to come back."

"May dogs defile their graves!" cursed Si Ular fervidly. "Yet will I go with thee. It is foolish; but, *ya Allah*, the ways of white men be past comprehension!"

Pé-Uish returned presently—which was more than Sam had dared to hope, for by all the laws of the jungle she should have gone off with her people. But she became manifest suddenly, standing in the dark beside Si Ular without having come from any particular direction that anyone could note. She bore a handful of leaves and proceeded to make cuts in Brett's side where the dart had struck him, and bind on a poultice of the crushed herb.

"He must lie there," she told Si Ular. "Later we take him down in the sampan, and there will be many days in his room while I tend him."

She went on to tell that she had had speech with To-Nat, the Sakai chief of this band. They had gone back to their camp, where the young men would prepare rattan runways through the treetops for escape when their huts should be surrounded by the Malays. Men, women and children would all take to the trees, then. The runways would be long enough to allow all the band to vanish into the jungle over their besiegers' heads.

It was all swift as a flash of light—the murderous face close to Sam's, the bright steel plunging for his vitals.

Si Ular shook his head. It was a subtle plan, but: "O mother of many sorrows, they will cut the runways while your people be upon them, and all will crash down into the forest and be killed or taken," he objected. "Po-Ut is with them. Yea, he knows that runway trick! Ye are lost!"

The effect of that announcement upon the old woman that the renegade Sakai, Po-Ut, was with Mat Tombak's party was indescribable. A groan of utter despair, a beating of her breast; abject misery claimed her. She had nephews, nieces, grandchildren in this very band, she wailed to Si Ular. Then she flung herself at Sam's feet, clasping his ankles in an agony of beseeching: "O thou who came bringing peace and mercy, but my people would not hear —save them!" she begged in her barbarous Melayu. "Help, O Tuan Besar! My children! I that have eaten thy rice—"

"Be of good cheer, Mother!" interrupted Sam. "Guide us to this village, and we'll attend to Mat Tombak when he comes! Only, beg them not to shoot at *us*—"

THE loud *sorak,* much nearer now, sounded thrice in the jungle below. Mat Tombak and his war-canoes were coming up the Jelai as fast as paddles could drive them. Gasps of terror came from Pé-Uish. She and hers were much more afraid of the Malays than of any white men whatsoever. They knew that the *sorak* always meant death or capture to their men, certain capture for the women and children. Then down-river to a slavery in distant lands whence no Sakai ever returned.

"Come, great and good Tuan!" she rose to urge Sam. "I go before when we reach the village. On my life, they shall not shoot at thee!"

There was need for haste. The Malay war-party would disembark at the foot of the rapids in a very short time more. Guided by Po-Ut, they would surround the wretched Sakai collection of huts on all sides. There would be a brief and victorious battle of guns, javelins and krisses against the Sakai blowgun and bamboo spear; then the survivors would be gathered and smuggled down-river to the waiting Arab dhow.

Pé-Uish disposed Brett comfortably in the jungle off the trail and then led on upward through blackness that seemed all impenetrable leafage. Twice she stopped them at places spiked with sharp bamboo stakes no bigger than nails, that were fatal to step on. A crawl ensued, through con-

cealed detours amid vines and creepers that were used by the Sakai themselves, the stakes being left for their enemies. And then she was making low calls again. A clearing in the forest, dotted irregularly with the peaks of low attap thatch hovels, was dimly visible under the stars ahead.

Si Ular was still shaking his head. "Of what avail, Tuan?" he questioned. "Lo, Mat Tombak must take a slave if thou wilt hale him before the Governor. Wherefore arrest him if but raiding an empty village?"

There spoke the subtle Malay! Sam looked on him with a low whistle of appreciation. Indeed, if you would take Mat Tombak red-handed, with the proofs of his guilt on him, it must be when he and his warriors had actually captured one or more of the Sakai—otherwise their mission here was futile! To barge out on Mat Tombak when he and his men took the village with shouts would gain them nothing. The old devil would claim that he was a police force, merely engaged in the legitimate business of discouraging the lawless jungle assassins that were pestering the Tuan's plantation.

Yet you could not ask this band of Sakai to remain and take their chances in the ensuing fight. There were too many of their women and children present. It was a puzzler. Yet Si Ular was right. To finish up this affair with completeness it was essential for Sam, Dedham and the foreman to appear on the scene at precisely that instant when the slave-hunt was at its successful conclusion. Then there could be accusation and arrest.

MEANWHILE an utter silence reigned over the breathless black jungle. It meant that the Malay war-party had landed, were working up the ravine on all sides and getting into position to surround the village. At a sudden shout they would rush it and capture all it contained.

Pé-Uish had ceased her brief colloquy with the Sakai chief. She told Si Ular that the rattan runway was complete, the women and children ready to leave at the first alarm. Their own scouts were out in the jungle watching for the Malay attack. When they came in, the whole band would take to the trees and escape over the heads of their besiegers.

"*Aiwa!* And meet death before ever they leave the runway, Mother!" commented Si Ular sardonically. "That hound of Shaitan, Po-Ut, will find thy runway. And the Orang Melayu, too, can climb trees, and also cut! Better for thy people to stand and fight. The Tuan will help."

Pé-Uish moaned. "My people are equally afraid of the white man, ya Si Ular. I have begged, but they will not listen."

At last Sam had his idea. "Could you also find the runway, Mother?" he asked Pé-Uish.

The ancient hag grinned toothlessly upon him. "Before thou wert born, Tuan, I helped build them! Who should know the ways of my children better than I?"

"All right," said Sam shortly. "Lead thou us, Mother, to the end of that runway. And we shall see what befalls."

They were some time doing it. Crawling through the most outrageous of tangled undergrowth after old Pé-Uish, they made a circuit that brought them on the other side of that primitive clearing filled with flimsy Sakai huts. Tall, white-boled trees were frequent here, having huge flanged buttresses like writhing curtains of smooth-barked wood. Pé-Uish scanned each of these as they came to them, and finally set off directly away from the village. Sam could see nothing overhead except dense black canopies of leaves, but grunts of satisfaction were coming from her. And at one somewhat open space between two enormous tapangs—of which tree whole sampans were hollowed out—she seized his arm and pointed upward. Against the starlit interstices between branch-fronds he finally made out a thin, shining black line high overhead. Along that aërial route the Sakai would come, men, women bearing their babies, children of all ages, all agile as monkeys and expert as tight-rope walkers in this curious method of forest travel.

And then she stopped under a huge spreading banyan; there was a long wait.

FINALLY it broke out, that attack of Mat Tombak and his men. First the loud, triple *sorak*, then indiscriminate firing and yelling, a distant crackle of bushes, then red fire as they set burning the miserable Sakai shelters. Sam listened to the fight. It was coming this way, the bolder of the Sakai still on the ground and disputing with their spears and blowguns the onward rush of Mat Tombak from the deserted village.

The crash of Singapore muskets now was frequent and coming constantly nearer. Battle-yells, eager yelps of pursuit, barks from Sakai warriors encouraging each other. They were holding the Malays up all they could, while the bulk of the band was

escaping through the tree-tops overhead. Then there were rustlings in the jungle all about them; the Sakai were giving back stubbornly. One could hear the frequent *phew-pit!* of sumpitan darts as they fired at the advancing Malays. Once or twice Sam thought he saw the long rod of a blow-gun gleaming in the dense blackness all around, but you could see nothing distinctly save the red flash of a musket as it let go somewhere in the underbrush.

Those flashes were coming on swiftly. A harsh and barbarous voice kept calling urgently, coming straight for the very banyan under which Sam and his party sat. That voice was Po-Ut's. The renegade of his people had already located the rattan runway, and his purpose was evidently to get to the end of it first and capture the old and helpless in a lot when they arrived.

Swiftly the firing was concentrating in their direction. Si Ular nudged Sam and drew him within the huge roots of the banyan, for bullets were combing the underbrush all about them now, and a chance one might hit the Tuan Besar. Also it was necessary, he whispered, for them not to be discovered here when the Malays came up. Sam nodded. No; his idea was to lie low and break in on these proceedings at just the right moment.

Men were bursting triumphantly into the grove from every direction. Torches flared up. The light showed a vast glittering canopy of leaves, like a dense black tent-roof, high overhead. There were shouts of exultation, pointings upward. Sam could see dark figures up there high in the branches, taut V's of rattan rope with Sakai women and old men advancing tremblingly along them like strings of monkeys, their balance maintained by the tenuous grasp of the nearest handful of foliage. Low wails of despair were coming from them as they hesitated and stopped under the discovery of those flares. Answering screams of dismay came from their fighting men in the forest, a shower of darts, one or two Sakai bursting out recklessly, only to be shot down by the Malay muskets.

Then a naked and disheveled black creature brandishing a kris rushed for the banyan, followed by two active young Malays. Up into its branches they swarmed. Immediately after them came running a shouting and gesticulating Malay chieftain in a gold turban, a sarong of silken plaid girded up for battle, kris and musket in hand. Quickly he posted his men for the final rush when that rattan should be cut and the Sakai come tumbling down, a rich booty of slaves. Sam eyed him grimly from concealment in the banyan thicket. He knew those harsh and seamed features with the evil almond eyes—Mat Tombak, datu of his own village and supposedly the trusted chief of police of this district of the Upper Jelai—engaged in a private slave-hunt on his own. For that the powder of muskets served out to him by a benign government! A scoundrel indeed!

Up above, the bright flash of a kris gleamed in the lurid torch-light. A group of Sakai headed by an old man were chattering with terror as they stood on the last taut stretch of that rattan runway. They were trying to turn around and go back, but there was no time, for the rattan was strumming and singing as the Malay up there with the kris hacked at it. A frightful fall and a hopeless lifetime of slavery would be their lot within the next instant.

And then Sam raised his rifle and fired. They did not wait for the falling kris and its owner, but burst out of the banyan together, he and Dedham, and confronted Mat Tombak with rifles at poise. Sam leveled an accusing finger.

"*You!* Drop that musket! Throw down that kris—*quick!*" he barked in a voice of fury. "On your hams, every one of you!"

Their rifles swung menacingly, and every Malay present made haste to assume a humble and a squatting posture. The surprise had been too great for even anger to show its head. The Tuan Besar was miraculously *here!* And he had caught them all red-handed in the very act of slave-raiding! And behind him stood the whole power of the white government of Pahang. They all knew that. Mat Tombak's face was contorted with rage, but he had nothing to say.

"You are under arrest, Mat Tombak!" Sam went on cuttingly, using not the courteous "*thou*" but the contemptuous "*you*," a term of insult to a Malay.

"Tie him up, Dedham!" he added.

THAT last was too much for the war-chief and Datu! When a Malay feels that the misfortunes of life are no longer to be borne, he runs *amok*. Mat Tombak gave an exhibition of that custom right then; for with a swift stoop he had recovered his kris, and in the same leap, swift as light, he lunged with it at the Tuan Besar. It was all swift as a flash of light—the mur-

derous face suddenly close to Sam's, the bright wavy steel plunging for his vitals. An equally quick snatch from Si Ular behind was all that saved Sam! And then Dedham's rifle exploded close by, and Mat Tombak fell writhing before them, expired.

Sam looked down at a jacket side that was in ribbons where the kris had slashed it, and said harshly: "Any more of you want to try it? I'll shoot the first man of you who dares so much as move a hand!"

His eyes were ferocious as they swept the squatting group of Malays. That sudden Oriental battle-flame had flared up in their eyes as their chief had made his attempt on the life of the Tuan Besar, and for a moment every one of them was quite ready to join in and do massacre, come what might to them afterward. But beware the white man when rage flames in his eyes—he will kill as he would a venomous spider!

Cowed, they all gave tokens of submission. Sam took charge of the situation while he had it. He waved Si Ular forward. "This man is your Datu from now on," he told them. "I, the Tuan Besar, declare it! Ye will receive plantation pay. Ye will form a constabulary under his orders and mine. Otherwise the Governor will deal with ye according to law, as you deserve. Is it agreed?"

That told them how they stood! And Si Ular did not let them forget it. In another moment he was commanding the lot with his usual vituperation, and Sam had turned to Pé-Uish.

"Go to thy people, Mother," he ordered her. "They have seen that my words are true. Tell them further, this: No more will men hunt them in this *my* district! And if they but bring their rubber to the outskirts of my plantation a fair price will be paid for it. *Thou* knowest me, Mother! Go!"

To Dedham: "Come on, Harvey, old fire-pot!" said Sam in his usual bantering growl. "Enough of these heroics—hope I impressed 'em! Time we picked up poor old Brett and got him down to the hospital at Kwala Lipis, that's what! And a little sleep, now, wouldn't go so bad, either!"

He yawned and shouldered his rifle. Back to the sampans, Si Ular with twenty new constabulary at his back. And a large peace descended upon United Rubber No. 62 after that one eventful night. It's a way Malaya has, if you treat her in her own nonchalant and casual fashion!

The Forty-Cent Wager

The memorable story of a good prize-fighter who was also a husband and father—by the gifted author of "Kid Weber Does His Best."

By RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN

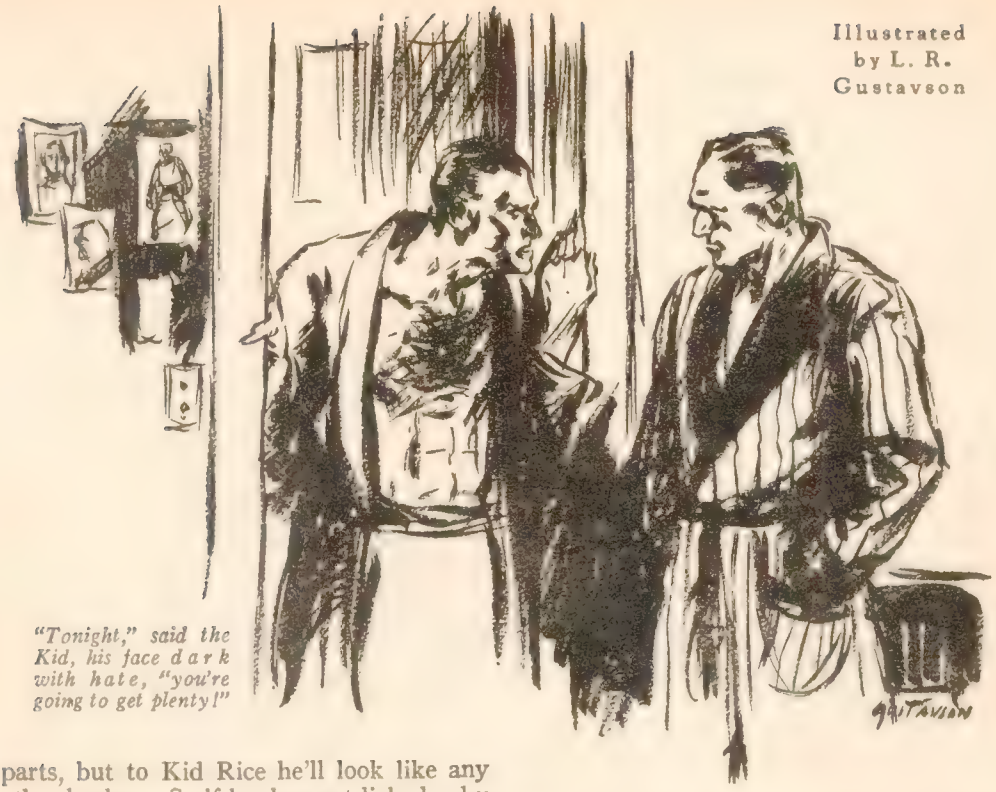
JACK MARLEY, assistant to the promoter of the Midland City Sporting Club, leaned back in his chair, eyes half closed and lips drawn tightly together. For a moment he regarded the fat, piggish face of the man who shared with him the privacy of the promoter's office; then he said quietly:

"It listens good, Harper. But I'd be taking a terrible chance."

"Chance!" Jud Harper flung back the word with a snort. "In the first place, it aint much of a chance to be taking, because nobody would ever get wise. See? And anyway, I guess a real clean-up is worth taking a chance for!"

Marley was thinking hard. The cheeks of his long lean face were sucked in between his teeth; his eyes were still mere slits. Harper saw his advantage, and he talked on hurriedly, persuasively, fearful that the opportunity would pass. Willard Price, the promoter, was out of town, and this man, Marley, was temporarily in charge of the Club. Harper would not have dared to make the proposal to Price; but with Marley it was a different matter; Marley, drudging along on a salary—Marley, with a crooked streak in him somewhere that Harper had immediately sensed.

"Now, listen here, Marley," said Harper. "You know as well as I do that my boy can lick this Todd fellow any night in the week. He may be an idol around these



Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"Tonight," said the Kid, his face dark with hate, "you're going to get plenty!"

parts, but to Kid Rice he'll look like any other busher. So if he does get licked, why would anybody think it's a frame-up?"

"Then why all the funny business?" Marley encountered. "If the Kid is sure to lick him, why not just bet that way and let the fight alone?"

HARPER made a gesture of impatience. "It's the round!" he explained eagerly. "Where we clean up is in naming the round! The fight is ten rounds—see? Well, the yaps around here think that Todd is the gamest and toughest guy that ever stood up in a ring. Even those who aint sure that he can whip the Kid would bet their shirts that the Kid couldn't put him out. And as for putting him away in less than five rounds—say! As I understand it, there aint a man in Midland City who wouldn't draw out his savings to bet against *that!*"

"That's true," Marley agreed thoughtfully. "Todd hasn't been knocked out but twice in his life, and both times when he was a beginner. And he can scrap, too! He aint middleweight champ of this state for nothing!"

Harper's fat lips curled into a sneer.

"Champ of this State! As if that means anything! Aint my boy listed among the first ten middleweights in the whole world? Frame-up or no frame-up, the Kid will knock Todd cold and name the round, too!"

Marley repeated: "Then why the funny business?"

"We got to make *sure,*" Harper retorted impatiently. "The Kid and me want to put up twenty-five grand on it; and we aint taking no chances of a slip-up. When we bet the fifth, it's gotta *be* the fifth, and not the sixth. See? Now what do you say? We'll slip you twenty-five hundred for helping us with Todd. And you can bet whatever you can raise. It's a clean-up, I tell you!"

Marley suddenly leaned over and gripped Harper's pudgy hand.

"It's a go, Harper! But whether we can do anything with Todd, I aint so sure. I think the best plan is for all of us to tackle him at once."

"I guess you're right," Harper answered. "We'll all work on him. I understand he's got a wife and two kids and that his bankroll aint any too thick. All that helps."

Marley nodded. "Sure. He was in here only a few days ago asking me to find a good fight for him. One of his kids was pretty sick the past winter, he says, and his expenses was awful big."

"Good!" cried Harper. "Who is Todd's manager?"

"He manages himself," said Marley. "That's where he's made his big mistake, I think. If he'd had a good manager, that boy might 'a' been in the East by this time and in the big money."

Harper rose ponderously to his feet. "Can you get in touch with him right away?"

"Sure. I'll have him here in the office at three this afternoon. You be here at that time with Kid Rice."

JIMMY TODD was delighted to get that telephone message from the acting-manager of the City Sporting Club. All Marley had said was that Jimmy should appear in Marley's office that afternoon; but he was certain that it meant signing up for a bout.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they want to match me up with Kid Rice," he told his wife. "I read where the Kid is in town looking for a scrap or two before he travels on to the coast."

"Would that mean pretty good money?" Irene Todd asked, looking up hopefully.

"It ought to," he replied. "The Kid would be a big drawing-card."

"How about yourself?" she said. "Gee, Jimmy! Isn't it a shame we can't seem to get anywhere? Look at how those fighters make fortunes every time they get into a ring. And most of them aren't any better than you are!"

Standing behind her chair, he stroked her dark hair gently. He noticed, with a sort of shock, the gray hairs which his fingers disclosed. There weren't many; only two or three; but they reminded him that time was passing. Irene was thirty-one, two years older than himself; and they had been married nearly ten years!

They had been mere kids when they had married, he reflected; especially himself. At nineteen he had just become a professional boxer—a lightweight then—and had won his first two preliminary bouts. He had thought that he was pretty good; had visioned himself as the future champion of the world. And when he met Irene, she had agreed with him. Nearly ten years ago!

"But I seem to be standing still," he mused, looking down at those few gray hairs. "State Champion! A lot that means! Sure, we live well enough; but where's the bankroll? Fifteen thousand dollars, maybe, we've saved up; and half of it tied up in this house. And I'm twenty-nine. That's old for a fighter."

HE carried these thoughts with him to his appointment with Marley. He was not surprised, on entering the office, to see Kid Rice and his manager, Jud Harper. He shook hands all around and absently sized up the Kid. He had never seen the Kid before, but, of course, he knew his record for the past five years. The Kid was a topnotcher; had fought all of the big fellows except the champion himself. And now that he was generally accepted as a leading contender, sooner or later he would get his shot at the championship.

"Well, Jimmy," said Marley, getting down to business, "how would you like to do ten rounds with Kid Rice a week from next Friday night?"

"Sure," Jimmy answered. "I'm in good condition and I can be ready by then."

"What do you weigh?" put in Harper.

"About one-sixty-four now," said Todd, "but I can come in at one-sixty. How about the Kid?"

"He's at weight now," Harper asserted. "He's always at weight. I see to that."

"As to the articles," Marley spoke up, "I guess the Kid will have to get the hog's share, Jimmy. He's got a big name in the East, so he's got a right to the big cut."

For a moment Jimmy regarded his muscular hands; then he looked up at Marley.

"That's the break I always get," he complained. "If I meet a good man, he gets most of what there is, and I get what's left. And if I'm matched with a dub, there aint enough coin in the house to *get* any big cut."

Marley and Harper exchanged meaning glances. Kid Rice grinned.

"So you're after some big money, eh, Jimmy?" inquired Marley.

"Oh, no!" Jimmy replied sarcastically. "I just love to pike along!"

Marley hesitated a moment. Harper stepped forward into the pause.

"If it's big money you're after, Todd," he said genially, "I can show you the way to it."

"How?"

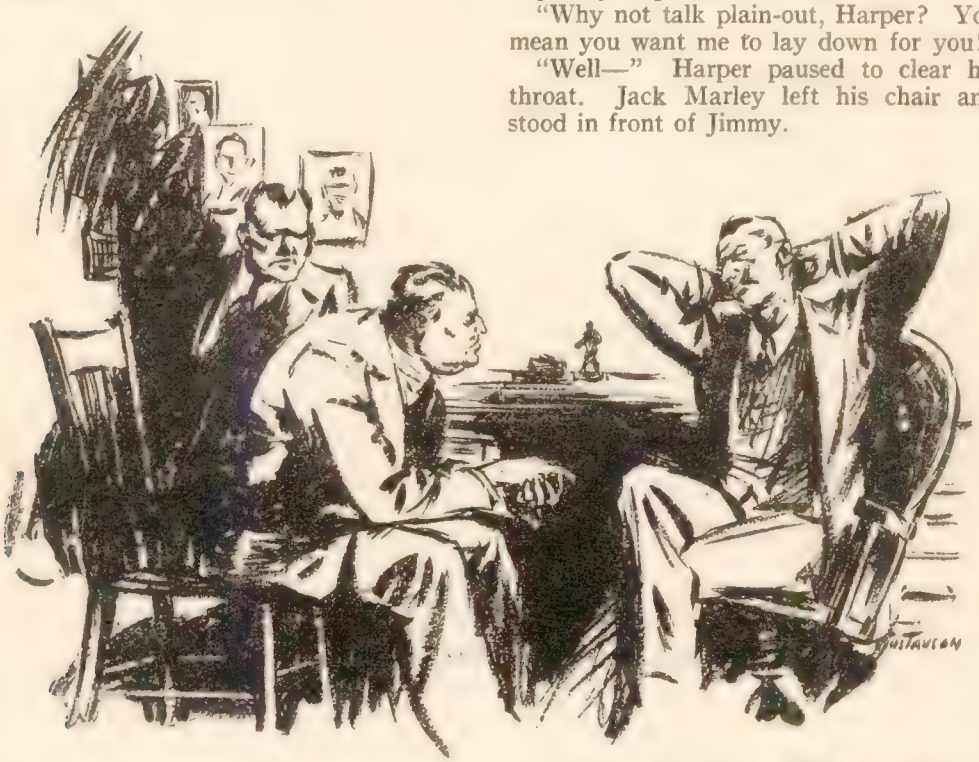
"Sit down," said Harper, indicating the fourth and vacant chair. "We'll talk this thing over."

Jimmy seated himself. He scented mystery, an attitude of furtiveness about the other men.

"Well," he said, "what's on your mind?"

"In the first place," Harper began, "you aint got the idea that you can lick the Kid, have you?"

Jimmy avoided Kid Rice's eyes, which he knew were regarding him somewhat mockingly. The Kid was grinning. His flat-nosed face knew but two expressions: Inside the ring, he snarled; outside the ring, he grinned.



Jimmy's lips curled. "Why not talk plain-out, Harper? You mean you want me to lay down for you!"

"I don't know anything about that," Jimmy replied. "When I get in the ring, I do my best. If I lose, it aint my fault."

"You never saw the Kid in action?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Well, then," said Harper, "you might as well know beforehand that you can't lick him. You never met as good a man in your life."

"Well, what about it?" Jimmy demanded. "Is this supposed to be the regular goat-getting stuff?"

"Not a bit of it," said Harper smoothly. "I'm talking to you like a friend. You were belly-aching about not getting into the big money. Now I'm trying to show you how you can make a clean-up for yourself."

Jimmy's eyes narrowed. "I think I get you. You want to arrange a frame-up."

Harper rubbed his fat hands together.

"Not exactly. No, you'd hardly call it a frame-up. The point is, the Kid is actually too good for you. He's out of your class. I don't mean you're a set-up, exactly. You got what class there is in these parts, and you'll put up a good fight. But just the same, the Kid is out of your class and he's going to knock you out anyway."

Jimmy's lips curled a trifle.

"Why not talk plain-out, Harper? You mean you want me to lay down for you!"

"Well—" Harper paused to clear his throat. Jack Marley left his chair and stood in front of Jimmy.

"Listen, Jimmy," he put in. "You don't want to get on your high horse till you hear the whole thing. You say you want big money. You got a wife and two kids to think about. One of your kids has been sick, and your expenses has been pretty heavy. You told me all that the other day."

"I didn't say anything about being crooked!" Jimmy snapped.

Kid Rice laughed aloud. "My Gawd!" he cried.

"Shut up!" commanded Harper.

"There's a lot of difference," went on Marley, "between being crooked and making a gentleman's agreement. If you had a ghost of a chance to lick the Kid, we wouldn't say a word to you. But, like Harper just said, you aint got a chance, and you know it. According to that, I guess, it's crooked for you to take the match in the first place. So I might as well take the

thousand bucks I would pay you and give it to some other guy!"

It was a telling thrust. Jimmy needed that thousand. He didn't want to go home and tell Irene that he couldn't land the bout.

"That's different," he protested. "No matter who I fight, even if it was the champ himself, I can get in there and do my best. That's what you'd be paying me for."

"Did I say you shouldn't do your best?" said Harper. "You go ahead and do it; it wont do you no good. But the Kid and me has picked out the fifth round to finish you—see? We're going to bet twenty-five grand that you don't last more than five rounds. The fans around here think you're the berries, and there will be plenty of money floating around that says the Kid can't get you under six rounds, if at all."

"Then that's that," said Jimmy. "You go ahead and bet your twenty-five grand, or your fifty grand if you want to. I got nothing to say about that. But maybe you'll get a jolt when the fifth round is over and I'm still on my feet!"

"Nothing is impossible," Harper agreed. "You might be able to stand up through the fifth, and even the sixth. It's just that slim chance we don't want to take. And there's where you can get into the big money!"

"It's just this, Jimmy," argued Marley desperately. "The Kid is going to get you, sure as fate. If we just bet on a knock-out in ten rounds, we'll have to give odds; and there wont be much money, either, that says you wont take the count. But if we name the fifth round, or earlier, we'll find all the money we want, and even get good odds. All you got to do is try your best for four rounds; but if the Kid don't get you right in the fifth, you're to *let* him get you right—that's all! No faking. No laying down. What's the difference if he gets you in the fifth, or later? All we want is to make *sure*. Just take one on the chin before the fifth round ends."

"And for that," Harper added hastily, "we'll slip you five thousand bucks!"

"Not on your life!" Jimmy answered promptly. "Couldn't do it."

"Ten thousand!" said Harper. "We can afford that. We'll clean up plenty to give you ten. We'll get two to one for our money. There's big money for you!"

Jimmy sat very still, his hands turning to ice. Ten thousand dollars—and another thousand for the fight! Eleven grand, just to keep from ducking one little punch in the fifth round! Eleven thousand bucks! Almost as much as he had managed to save up after ten years of fighting.

He looked at Harper with vacant eyes.

"Will you give me a day or two to think this over?" he asked.

"Sure," said Harper. "We'll give you till day after tomorrow. But just remember, Todd, that you can't pick up eleven thousand every day in the week!"

TO the boxing public of Midland City, the announcement that Jimmy Todd had signed articles to meet Kid Rice came as no surprise. The newspapers had already informed the fans that the Eastern contender was in the city looking for a bout; and who could be selected as his opponent other than Todd, the local champion?

But if the prospective bout occasioned no surprise, it did create a stir. The fans idolized Jimmy Todd. For ten years, ever since he was a kid lightweight, they had flocked to the stadium whenever he was to fight, cheering him until they were hoarse, pulling for him to win. They more than idolized him; they loved him. They had seen him pick himself off the floor, where crashing blows had thrown him, weather a sickening beating until the bell sounded, and then, grim and courageous, carry on to win the battle. A game boy, they called him; a square-shooter.

And now he was to fight Kid Rice. Most of them knew all about Kid Rice, and those who didn't know were fully informed by the sport editors.

For all that they idolized Jimmy, there were few who believed that he could beat Kid Rice. But in this case, it developed, it wasn't the victory that seemed to be at stake. The question was: Could Jimmy give his best, take whatever the Kid had to give him, and still be on his feet after ten rounds of it? Evidently there were many who did not think so. The fight was ten days distant; and during the first few days unlimited money was offered without odds that Todd couldn't last ten rounds. The fans hesitated to take that bet.

But when, during the last week, they were offered the opportunity of wagering that Todd wouldn't last through the fifth, they smiled to themselves as they remembered Jimmy's unbreakable heart, his indomitable spirit; as they recalled that only twice in ten years, and then in the early days, had a referee counted him out. They

"He said I was afraid to bet on my Dad. So I got my money out of my bank and bet my forty cents against their forty cents."

accepted that bet, and were glad to give odds of two to one. Jimmy Todd knocked cold before five rounds? Why, the champion himself couldn't turn that trick!

AS this was an important bout, Jimmy did not live at home while he trained for it. He went to Sweeney's camp, on the outskirts of the city. Marley had demanded this move because, he declared, it added interest to the ballyhoo. It meant that Jimmy was training well; it was, in its way, a guarantee to the public that he would be at his best when he stepped into the ring with Kid Rice; it helped to loosen their bankrolls. Kid Rice trained desultorily at a gymnasium in town. It was whispered around that he was overconfident; that he underestimated Jimmy Todd and refused to work seriously for the bout. Rumor even had it that he had hurt his vital left hand on the punching dummy. These things also helped to loosen the fans' bankrolls. Marley and Harper were nobody's fools.

At Sweeney's camp, Jimmy worked hard, but his heart was heavy within him. He should be mighty happy, he tried to convince himself; eleven grand was a lot of money. He did not make the sure bet that would add many thousands to this amount. He didn't dare. Harper wouldn't pay him off until after the fight, nor would Marley; and he had no ready cash of any consequence. Of course, he could have raised money on his house, or sold some of his bonds, but he was afraid to take the risk. It would look funny, he decided, to raise a lot of money just before he fought, considering what the outcome would be. And, anyway, Irene held the purse-strings and he could do nothing with their money without her knowledge.

"I wouldn't have Irene know what I'm doing," he thought, "for a cool million."

He had lied enough to her, as it was. He knew that the large sum which he would bring home after the fight would have to be explained. Hitherto, he had never got more than twenty-five hundred for a bout; and that rarely. So he told her that because Kid Rice was a near-champion, and a wonderful drawing-card, they were paying him eleven thousand dollars. She was ecstatic with joy. Eleven thousand dollars!

"Jimmy darling!" she had cried, throwing her arms about his neck and kissing him. "I knew you'd get into the big money sooner or later! This is only the start! You'll win from Kid Rice, and then—"

"Win from him!" he had replied cautiously. "I'll be lucky if I stay the limit!"

The children had been there, Jimmy, Junior, nine years old, and Billy, seven, both shrilly excited.

"Aw!" said Junior. "I'll bet you'll win from that big stiff!"

Irene looked down severely at her eldest son.

"Junior!" she reprimanded him. "How often have I told you not to talk like that! 'I'll bet' and 'big stiff'! Shame on you!"

"He always talks like that!" said seven-year-old Billy. "He talks like that all the time!"

"Tattle-tale!" cried Junior. "Sissy tattle-tale!"

Jimmy laughed. "You kids run along and play nice together. And stop your fussing. You mustn't give your mother any trouble when I'm away at camp."

Yes, it had been necessary to lie to Irene. She was such a square-shooter; fair always to him, to the children, to everyone with whom she had dealings. But if for that very reason, he owed her a lot. He owed her security against the time when he could no longer fight. It was for Irene and the children that he was doing this thing.

LIKE most fighters' wives; Irene had never seen her husband in the boxing ring. But since the advent of the radio, and the broadcasting of the main-event bouts from the Stadium, she was wont to sit before the loud-speaker whenever Jimmy was fighting. She allowed the children to listen, too, though it kept them up until after ten o'clock, the hour when the main events began. Jimmy had said:

"Let the kids listen in. Being up late once in a while when I'm fighting wont hurt them. They wont sleep anyhow."

So, on this particular Friday night, when Jimmy was to fight the biggest battle of his career, there was great excitement in the Todd home. Already at nine-thirty, Junior wanted to tune in, though it was fifteen minutes before the Stadium "went on the air," and half an hour before the start of the big fight.

"Mamma," asked Billy, "is Daddy going to win tonight?"

"I hope so," Irene replied. "But if he loses, Billy, it wont be any disgrace. The man he's fighting is nearly a champion."

"But Daddy's a champ," said Billy.

"Only of this State," said Irene. "And the other man—"

"Oh, I know all about that," put in Junior. "Billy is such a sissy he don't know beans!"

"I aint a sissy!" cried the younger boy. "I know all about everything!"

"Well, who did Rice lick then?" asked the superior elder brother. "What's his record, if you know so much?"

Billy's lower lip trembled. "Well, maybe I don't know *that,*" he replied, "but at least I don't fight and use bad words and bet money!"

Junior's face grew dark with alarm. Irene asked:

"What's that? Fighting and using bad words and betting? Who does those things, Billy?"

"Jimmy!" Billy shouted. "Jimmy did all that!"

Junior doubled his fists. "I didn't; Mamma, don't you believe him!"

"You did!" insisted Billy. "You nearly fought Dick Marley, only he wouldn't fight! And you used bad words! And you bet money with Dick Marley and Sam Wilson and George Prentiss! You did *so!*"

One glance at Junior's face told Irene that he was guilty as charged. She took hold of his shoulders and made him stand before her; lifted his chin and made him meet her eyes.

"Jimmy," she said gently, "now tell me the truth. You know that you never lie to me. Did you do what Billy said?"

HE hung his head despite the soft fingers under his chin. Tears swam in his eyes.

"Yes'm," he confessed.

For a moment she was effectively silent. Then she said:

"Jimmy, I'm surprised at you! Haven't I told you that boys shouldn't fight like rowdies? Your Dad makes a business of boxing, but you never see him fight with anybody on the street, do you? Only rowdies do that. You never hear Daddy use bad words, do you? Only rowdies do that, too. And as for betting—what did you bet with the boys for?"

"I bet on Dad," said Junior, beginning to cry in earnest. "I couldn't help it, Mamma! Honest, I couldn't! I knew it was wrong, but I had to. You—you don't know what—what they said. It was Dick Marley who said it. He—he said my—my Dad was crooked!"

"Crooked!" echoed Irene.

"Yes, he did! He said how—how he listened at the door in his house when—when his Dad and another man was talking. And—and the other man was Harper who is Kid—Kid Rice's manager. And Dick said he heard them talk about how

Daddy was—was going to be crooked in this fight tonight. He said they were paying Daddy a lot of money to—to get knocked out. That's what he said, Mamma; and I told him he was a—a liar, because my Dad wasn't never, never crooked in all his life!"

He paused, sobbing; Irene said coldly:

"Go on, Junior. What else was said?"

"That's all he said, but—but I said I'd beat him up if—if he didn't take back what he—he said about my—my Dad. So he was afraid of me and—and he took it back. But he said I was afraid to bet on my Dad. So—so I came home and got my money out of my bank, and Dick didn't have that much, but Sam Wilson and George Prentiss had some, and—and I bet them my forty cents against their forty cents."

"Junior," said Irene, in that same strange voice, "isn't Dick Marley's father the man who arranges fights at the Stadium?"

"Yes'm. When Mr. Price is away, like now."

"Mamma," asked Billy, "aint you going to punish him for acting so bad?"

Irene had removed her hands from Junior's shoulders. She did not want the boy to feel her trembling.

"No, Billy, because Junior told me the truth. And though he oughtn't act that way, I—" She stopped short and sat staring at the wall.

"Eleven thousand dollars!" she said to herself. "Eleven thousand for one fight!"

JUNIOR quickly checked his sobs and dried his tears. He knew now that he wouldn't be punished. He watched his mother as she sat there, so strangely still and pale. He was sorry, then, that he had misbehaved. It made his mother so sad.

He eyed her regretfully as she suddenly rose and walked hurriedly into the kitchen. When she returned she said, "It's only twenty to ten! I think we can make it!" And with that she dashed into the bedroom and put on her hat and coat.

"Mamma, where are we going?" asked Junior.

But she did not seem to hear him. She told him to get his hat and coat; she helped Billy don his; and then they rushed from the house and into their automobile which was in the garage in the back yard.

She drove fast—down Wilson Avenue—along Spruce Street — into West Avenue. Then Junior knew where they were. He could see the circular frame structure of the City Sporting Club—the Stadium!

"Mamma!" he cried. "Are we going to the fight?"

She did not answer. They were in a parking lot now, adjoining the Stadium, and she jumped from the car as soon as the man gave her the check, Billy and Junior clinging to either hand. They went around to a side entrance; she spoke with a man standing near the doorway; the man went away and returned to let them through and led them to a small room with a leather table in it, and a few chairs, and green lockers.

The children were dazed by it all. Here they were, in the Stadium! Were they going to see Daddy fight tonight? What was the matter with Mother, then, that she walked up and down the room that way?

"She's going to tell Daddy on you," whispered Billy into Junior's ear. "That's why she came here. I heard the man say he would send Daddy in here to see us."

"You see what you did by telling on me?" Junior whispered back. "Look what you did to Mamma!"

Outside, beyond the closed door, they could hear a great shouting and cheering. Junior knew that the semi-final bout was being fought out there. And when that was over, Dad would fight Kid Rice. He regarded his mother uneasily. She ought to have waited to tell Dad on him until after the fight.

The door opened; and Jimmy Todd stepped into the room. He was dressed for the ring: bathrobe and purple trunks and socks rolled down over the tops of laced shoes. He closed the door behind him and looked at Irene and the boys in alarm.

"Why—what's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Anything wrong, Irene?"

"Jimmy," said Irene directly, "I—I just heard something!"

"What do you mean?"

"I heard what you are going to do tonight," Irene told him.

"I—I don't understand," he said rather lamely.

"You do!" she cried, standing face to face with him, close to him but not touching him. "Jimmy, you can't go through with it! You can't! I don't want that kind of money! I wont have it!"

SHE knew, all right, thought Jimmy. He didn't know how she had found out, but she knew. No use building lies upon a lie.

"Irene," he said, "you don't understand. I can't explain it to you in front of the kids. But—"

"I don't want anything explained to me," she cut in warmly. "I know enough as it is. Jimmy," she added, her voice breaking, "I can't believe you'd do it! You've been so square all your life!"

"It's for you, honey, and the kids!"

"No!" she cried. "It's not for me and the kids! If that was so, you'd have told me. You knew what I'd have to say about it! The public here have been your friends. They've been too good to you to deserve a raw deal like this from you!"

"But, Irene—"

"You listen! Do you want to know how I found out? Junior told me!"

"Junior!"

"Jack Marley's son told him that you were being paid to throw this fight! When Junior heard that, he offered to fight that boy! He made him take back his words! He ran home and took his few pennies from his bank and bet with several boys that you would win!"

"So!" breathed Jimmy Todd, staring above his wife's head at the green lockers.

"Do you know what that means—what it stands for? Don't you want your boys always to be ready to defend your good name against anybody who talks against you? And don't you want them to be *right* about it? When you get in the ring tonight, just remember that your son bet his few pennies on you!"

"It—it wasn't a few pennies," said Junior, honestly trying to correct a false impression. "It was forty cents."

For a moment Jimmy looked down at his sons. The ball at his throat leaped up and down as he swallowed. He turned to his wife.

"What am I going to do now?" he asked helplessly. "How can I let down those men? They've bet more than twenty-five thousand."

"Those men!" she cried. "Those thieves, you mean! Well, be fair to them. Tell them that you're backing out. Either don't fight at all tonight or tell them to call off all bets before you begin. That's more than they deserve."

Again Jimmy stared down at his boys. His mouth tightened and his jaw stood out squarely.

"O. K., Irene! I'll do it. I'll give them their choice. No fight or all bets off. So, Junior! You bet forty cents on me?"

"I—I promise not to bet again," said Junior nervously.

"That's right," said his father. "Betting is no good. Did you bet that I'd win?"

"I bet you wouldn't get knocked out," said the boy.

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"Well, I'll see what can be done about it." He turned to Irene. It was good to see that light of pride and love in her eyes! "You go home, honey. I got to hurry. It's just about starting time. I guess they'll want me to fight, anyway, rather than call it off at the last minute."

"I'm not going home, Jimmy. For the first time, I'm going to watch you fight. And the boys will watch you, too. I'll get seats at ringside if I have to crowd into the press-box. I want these boys to see how you fight—win or lose!"

IN his dressing-room, Jimmy stood facing the three men whom he had hastily summoned. He told them bluntly that he wouldn't abide by his agreement.

"I can't go through with it," he said. "I don't see how I ever agreed to it in the first place. I must have been batty when I said I would. And—well, it's all off."

"You mean—you're double-crossing us?" gasped Harper, his face like gray dough.

"Double-crossing you!" Jimmy Todd returned. "I'm telling you, aint I? You can call off the scrap if you want. Or you can announce from the ring that I didn't make weight, or something, and that all bets are off."

Harper and Marley stood like stricken men, looking incredulously at Jimmy and at each other. Kid Rice, his face stolid and expressionless, leaned back against the rubbing-table, the robe falling away from his hairy chest.

"We can't call off the fight," said Marley. "The house is packed and waiting."

"Call off all bets then," said Jimmy firmly. "I'm telling you straight that I'm going in there to do my best. If I can win, I'm going to."

"My God!" groaned Harper, passing his hand across his forehead. "My God!"

"Now listen, Jimmy," said Marley plaintively. "You can't turn us down like this at the last minute. We're set to clean up a fortune. If we call off the bets, we'll lose more than fifty thousand bucks!"

"He's sand-bagging us!" cried Harper suddenly. "That's what he's doing! Well, if that's the game, I guess you got us! I'll

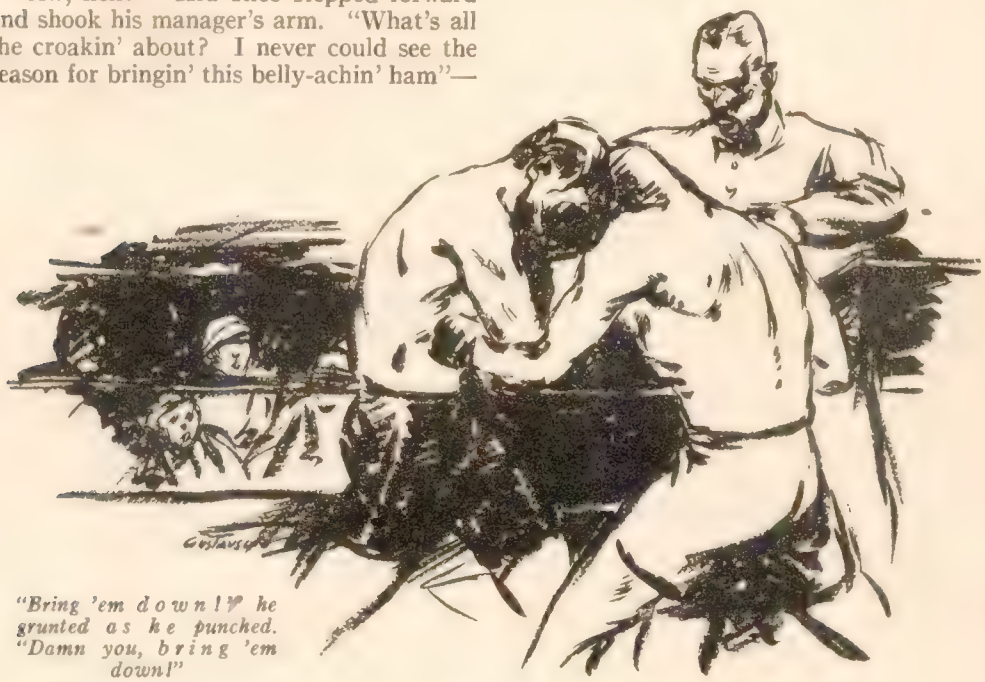
give you fifteen instead of ten, but not a dollar more!"

"You got me wrong!" Jimmy replied. "I aint holding out for a bigger cut. I don't want anything at all except my thousand for the fight. I fight straight tonight or I don't fight at all."

"Aw, hell!" Kid Rice stepped forward and shook his manager's arm. "What's all the croakin' about? I never could see the reason for bringin' this belly-achin' ham"—

"That's O. K. with me," said Jimmy, breathing hard under the lash of their tongues. "But listen, Marley: I want a square deal in that ring. Who's going to referee?"

"DeGriff," replied Marley.



"Bring 'em down!" he grunted as he punched. "Damn you, bring 'em down!"

he jerked a thumb at Jimmy—"in the business. Slippin' him ten grand to take one on the chin! Hell! He'll take one on the chin without no ten grand!"

Harper looked at Rice quickly. "You mean—"

"Sure, I mean!" said the Kid. "Since when do we got to pay a blinkety-blank like him to lay down for me? You wanted to make sure, you says, so I kept out of it. But I got my coin on the line, and it stays there, get me? Don't call off no bets!"

HARPER looked into the Kid's snarling face. Its very ugliness reassured him. He smiled grimly and turned to Marley.

"You hear that, Marley? The Kid is right! We should worry if that yellow tanker fights square or not! My boy can lick the champ, given the chance. As for this white-livered—" He looked at Jimmy. "You hear, Todd? The bets stand. The only thing that's off is your ten thou'! Now get in the ring, you squealing rat, and get what's coming to you!"

Jimmy nodded his satisfaction. DeGriff couldn't be bought at any price.

"Let's go then," said Jimmy. He started toward the door, but Kid Rice was there before him, facing him, blocking the exit.

"Tonight," said the Kid, his face dark with hate, "you're going to get plenty! I us'ally go easy on hams like you; but now I'm going to put you in the hospital. You hear me, you—"

He called Jimmy every vile epithet that he could command. Jimmy closed his fists, but forced himself to open them. He mustn't get mad. He mustn't let them get his goat. He'd need a calm head tonight.

"Is that how you fight — with your mouth?" he sneered.

Kid Rice drew back a fist. Harper, standing behind him, caught his arm.

"Nix, Kid!" he warned. "You'll queer it!"

"The ring's cleared," said Marley. "Come on! Come on!"

Jimmy lingered in back while the Kid and Harper walked down the long aisle

to the ring. He found his handlers waiting for him at the head of the aisle—Sweeney, his trainer, and Campbell, the other second.

"What was going on in there?" asked Sweeney, who knew nothing of the conspiracy and its disruption.

"Nothing," Jimmy answered shortly. "Let's get going."

THE fans had given Rice a nice hand when he had entered the ring, but when Jimmy Todd climbed through the ropes, they went wild. The large amphitheater was filled to capacity; and with all the lights out except those which flooded the ring, the small flares of cigars and cigarettes danced like glow-worms among the diagonal sections between the aisles and the dark masses that climbed the farther walls. Jimmy clasped his hands and shook them in the air above his head: his "Hello" and "thank you" to that almost invisible army of friends. As he stepped into the resin in a neutral corner, he looked down into the light-flooded press-box; into the uplifted faces of Irene and the boys. Irene was smiling—a queer strained smile. Junior was all eyes; his lips were parted and he seemed to be holding his breath. But Billy clapped his hands.

"Daddy!" he shouted shrilly. "Daddy!"

Jimmy tried to say, "Hello," but his throat closed over the word. Instead, he smiled and waved a hand; and then he turned his eyes away. He mustn't look at them again, he decided.

His shoes resined, he went to his own corner and seated himself on the stool. It was the rule that bandages and gloves must be put on in the ring; and now these matters were attended to, Campbell watching in the Kid's corner, one of Rice's seconds watching in Jimmy's, and the referee keeping an eye on both.

"Remember the plan of action," said Sweeney, kneeling before Jimmy as he wound the tape. "Try to keep away from that left of his. Always work over to the left, because his left is the dangerous hand. If you're on the left, he can't hook with it and his straight jabs wont have the pep. If you force him to use his right, you've got him. I seen him fight Wallace in New York and I know. Wallace kept left, made the Kid use his right and then beat him to the punch with his own right. If you follow that plan, you can lick him."

"What I want to do," said Jimmy, almost to himself, "is go the limit."

DURING the formalities of introductions and referee's instructions, he kept his eyes away from the press-box. At length the ring was cleared, the fighters stood waiting in their corners, the gong sounded sharply, and Jimmy danced cautiously out to meet the snarling Kid.

"Keep to the left," warned his brain. "Watch out for his left. Ten rounds to go—and the boy bet forty cents."

Kid Rice came tearing in like a mad dog, weaving, shifty on his feet, working in close to use his short left hook. The Kid was good and he knew it. He was tough, too, and could take a stiff punch without buckling at the knees. Caution was not his part, especially not with a busher like Jimmy Todd. Usually he just played with this sort, taking his time, letting the other boy off easy, giving the yap fans a run for their money. But tonight was another matter. He'd carry Todd along for two or three rounds, just to give him the beating he deserved; and then he'd put him away. First get at his ribs with that crushing left fist. Break a few ribs for him. Then batter his damn' face to a pulp, and—not later than the fourth round—drop him cold. He had hate in his heart and coin on the line.

Jimmy tried to keep to the left, but it was not an easy matter with Kid Rice in the reckoning. Before the first minute had passed, Jimmy realized that the Kid was every bit as good as he was rated. God, how shifty! How, like a streak, he worked to the right, putting Jimmy within range of that piston-like left fist!

At the end of the first round, Jimmy went back to his corner with the right side of his body marked with long red stripes.

"Keep to the left," said Sweeney, rubbing him. "You gotta do that!"

"He's plain lightning," answered Jimmy, breathing well, scarcely feeling his pain. "I'm trying, but he works over there so fast! And how he can hit!"

"Tie him up in the clinches," said Sweeney. "Keep your elbows low, but don't bring down your guard. That's what he wants. Then he'll work on your face."

"He's tough," said Jimmy. "I got him three times coming in. Didn't even halt him." He thought: "Nine rounds to go—and the boy bet forty cents."

AS they went out for the second, the Kid rushed in again, going into a clinch with his left arm free and landing solidly before Jimmy could tie him up.

"How do you like it?" sneered the Kid, before they broke. "I'll make you like it, you—"

Jimmy said nothing. He danced away, wincing. He didn't like it at all; that last blow seemed to have crushed every bone in the right side of his body. When he drew a breath, pain stabbed him like a knife. Why couldn't he keep to the left? At least, the Kid would have to play the other side.

He heard the crowd shouting and cheering. There was joy in that concerted voice; their Jimmy had brought a trickle of blood from the Kid's nose, and they thought it spelled victory. To them, blood meant pain and defeat. They didn't know the agony of bruised, broken ribs that scarcely showed an outward mark.

Again and again during that second round, the Kid found the already crushed target of Jimmy's right side. But when the bell rang, Jimmy's gloves still protected his face and jaw.

"You've got him now," said Harper, leaning over the Kid. "He can't stand much more of that. Next round he'll bring down his guard, and then you get his face. This is the third, Kid. You gotta get him no later than the fourth, to make sure."

"I'll get him!" said the Kid. "He don't leave nothing open but that right side. But I'll fix it."

The Kid, however, did not seem to be able to "fix it" during the third. He got to the right well enough, and he pounded that red-streaked side until Jimmy openly shrank away and groaned; but he kept his face covered against the left hooks and uppercuts that the Kid flashed upwards.

When the Kid went back to his corner after the third, there was a pucker between his brows.

"How in hell can he stand it?" he asked his manager. "I never put more into my punches. He can't have a whole rib left over there."

"*Bring down his gloves!*" Harper said somewhat hoarsely. "This is the fourth! You can't knock him out by just pounding the ribs!"

Jimmy leaned back against the ropes in his corner. He tried not to breathe too deeply. The pain of it was almost more than he could bear.

"Don't rub me there!" he cried out to Sweeney. "They must be broken."

Sweeney was in despair.

"You're leaving yourself open there, Jimmy! Can't you cover it? Can't you keep him away?"

"He can't drop me with one of those," said Jimmy. "I can stand a lot of that. And I gotta stick, no matter what."

NO matter what! The Kid had more than hate to drive him on now. He was getting desperate. Coin on the line! Ten thousand bucks of his own money! And this damn' busher standing up and standing up, when he, Kid Rice, wanted to drop him for the count! The fool wasn't made of stone; he gasped and groaned every time that fist found its mark. Then why didn't he bring down his guard?

He pounded and pounded. In the clinches he dug his elbow in and felt the bones give way. Jimmy's face was white; his eyes were blurred with pain; he could no longer even try to work to the left. All he could do was to keep his gloves raised.

"What—round is this?" he asked when he found himself again in his corner.

"The fifth coming up," said Sweeney. "Can you stand it, Jimmy? Should I—"

"No!" said Jimmy. "You keep out of this, Hank! When I've got enough, I'll do my own quitting!"

The fifth coming up! It meant a lot to the shouting crowd out there. They had bet, nearly every man of them, that no one, not even Kid Rice, could make Jimmy Todd quit inside of five rounds. They sensed, though, that Jimmy was hurt, even though it was the other who showed the stains of blood.

They had been shouting: "Get him, Jimmy! Give it to him, Todd! Knock him out! Knock him cold!" But now they cried, "Jimmy—hang on! Hang on! Hang on!"

And Jimmy hung on. He didn't hear them, but he hung on anyway. He knew that he couldn't stand much more of it; he began to doubt if he could last ten rounds. But at least, he must go through this fifth round, with his guard up, his chin protected. He had helped to make the fans bet on that. Through the press he had practically promised them that he'd be standing up there at the close of the fifth.

Time must be passing, he told himself as he was driven back to the ropes. Three minutes can't last forever. And that same thought was in the Kid's maddened mind. He measured the red target that was bleeding now through the split skin. He put every ounce of strength into each blow.

"Bring 'em down!" he grunted as he punched. "Damn you, bring 'em down!"

How Jimmy longed to "bring 'em down!" How frantically he wanted to put a buffeting glove between those driving fists and his cracked ribs! Next round he'd do it; he'd take a chance then. He'd fight it out, toe to toe; get his face beaten to a pulp if he must — anything to stop those blows against his right ribs. But now—he must keep his gloves up. . . . .

With leaden feet he worked out of that corner, across the ring and into another. He couldn't get away from Kid Rice. He was kept always on the ropes where he couldn't even draw back a little from the blows. Why didn't that bell ring? Were they holding out on him? Why didn't—

Another left, splintering into his side. His lips weren't cut, but he tasted blood in his mouth.

"Aw-w-w-w," he groaned, and felt himself sliding to the floor.

Kid Rice was gone. That was the first impression. The Kid was no longer hammering his side, digging long-bladed knives into it. Free of it now, free of it! Where was he—in his corner? Was the round over? Was that Sweeney there, bending over him?

He stared at the blurred face above him; and with a shock of agony, mightier than his pain, he realized that it belonged to DeGriff. The referee was shouting, *"Three! . . . . Four! . . . . Five! . . . ."*

Down on the floor! Knocked out! DeGriff was counting him out! . . . . He rolled over on his face. He managed to get to his hands and knees.

"Six! . . . . Seven! . . . . Eight! . . . ."

He found himself looking down, through the ropes and out of the ring. It was light down there. There were faces — people. Was that Irene? Were those the boys? They shouldn't be here to see this . . . . Junior would lose his forty cents.

"Nine!" . . . ."

He heard that. It was the referee saying, "Nine!"

"Daddy!" came Billy's shrill cry then. "Daddy, get up!"

Jimmy smiled. That was Billy, all right, echoing everyone else. Jimmy tried to smile. His lips moved when he tried to say: "I'm getting up, Billy. See—I'm getting up."

And he was. Before the echo of "Nine!" had died away, he had caught hold of a rope and was pulling himself to his feet.

How they were screaming out there! The clamor was a thick hum in his ears. He felt a little better now, a little rested. He saw, plainly enough, the snarling Kid coming at him again. He covered, his face and jaw protected, and set himself for the blow that never landed. For at that instant sounded the gong that ended the fifth round.

AFTER one minute of the sixth round, DeGriff stopped the one-sided fight. All that Jimmy was able to do was to protect his right side; and the Kid was having his revenge. The Kid had lost, and he intended to make Jimmy pay for it. Stayed up through the fifth, had he? Well, he'd stay up longer — until his face was as smashed as his ribs!

But DeGriff stopped it; and when they carried Jimmy from the ring, the fans rose and cheered as they would have cheered a hero. Their Jimmy! Where was there a gamer boy?

Jimmy lay on the rubbing-table in his dressing-room, gritting his teeth while the doctor set his broken ribs and bandaged him. Then he slept; and when he awoke, he saw that it was day and he was in his bed at home. Irene was bending over him anxiously.

"Hello, honey!" And he smiled faintly.

She kissed him, and left a tear on his face.

"Feeling better, Jimmy?" she asked.

"Oh, I'll be O. K. in a few days. Couple of cracked ribs, that's all. . . . . You oughtn't to have seen it, honey. The kids oughtn't to have seen it."

"I'm glad they did," she said softly. "Now they know what it means to be game."

Jimmy turned his head and saw, in the open doorway, his two boys.

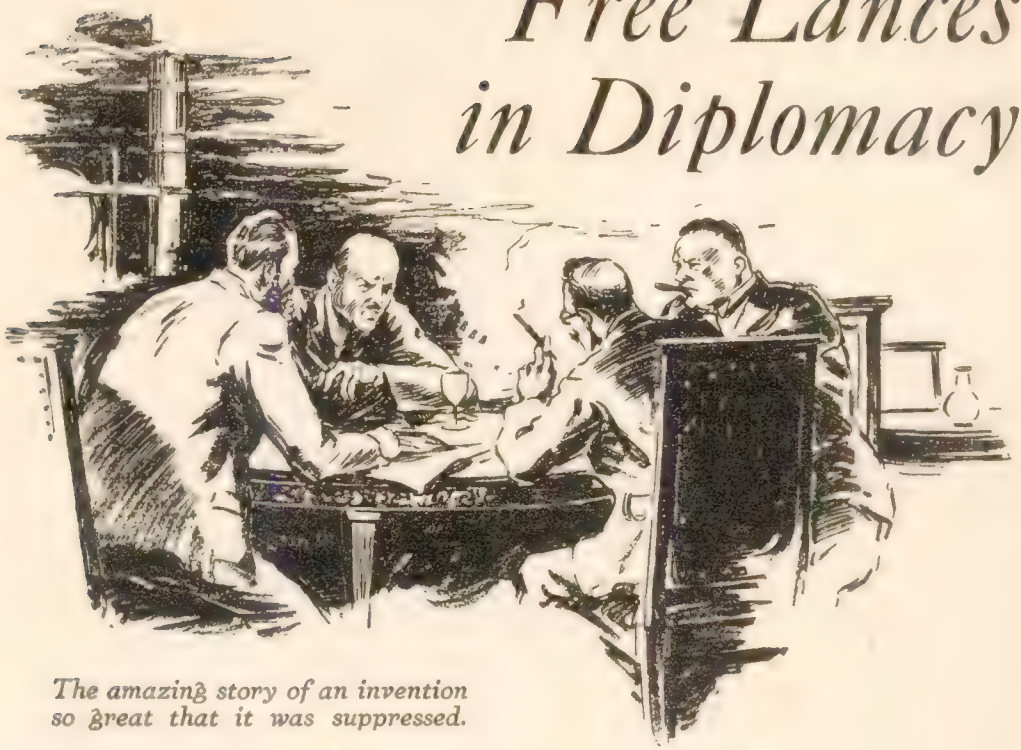
"Hey, kids!" he called out cheerily. "Come in here."

They came to the bedside, as silent as children always are in a sick-room.

"Junior," said Jimmy, "I'm sorry I lost, old sport. But remember this: Sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose; but the thing that counts is to do your best. I did my best, Junior. But you shouldn't have bet your forty cents, because I don't always win."

"I didn't lose it," the boy answered, regarding his father so proudly his eyes seemed to flash. "Dick Marley said you would get knocked out before the fifth round because you were crooked. That's what I bet on, Dad!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy



The amazing story of an invention so great that it was suppressed.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by J. Fleming Gould

EVER since the amazing try-out of a Trevor amphibian plane made from the recently developed "Aylesworth metal," those most closely associated with Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint had noticed that he seemed to be intensely preoccupied a good deal of the time. Other tests of the wonder plane had followed until there was no shadow of doubt that any Government possessing a fleet of such planes would control the air—or at least have an immense advantage in aërial warfare. Nor did the advantage stop there. Every type of machinery in which it was used would be vastly superior to all others.

For weeks His Lordship had been testing out the metal at Trevor Hall. Finally an evening came when he and Viscount Brantford, the discoverer of the metal, rode up from the laboratories and machine-shops quite convinced as to what they had and what it would do.

After dinner, the Earl took Brantford into his private study, locked the door, and touched a spring which slid back a section of the flooring, revealing a circular iron stair leading down into the heart of the rocky cliff upon which the castle was built. Another spring pulled back the slab of stone in the floor, restoring it to its usual appearance from above. Then they descended sixty feet to a rock chamber, in one wall of which there was a steel door more intricate and stronger than that of any safe-deposit vault in Chancery Lane. This door, when finally opened, admitted them to a vault with steel walls bolted to the solid rock.

In the wall at the left there was another door exactly like the first one, but leading to a long, twisting passage through the rock with two more steel doors and another circular stair, which permitted an exit through the mosaic pavement of the east terrace where the corner was partly surrounded by shrubbery. This section of the mosaic could not be opened from the top—but it permitted escape from the vault below in case the entrance from the study was blocked by fire or unavailable from any other cause.

The vault itself was so luxuriously fitted up—with a great open fireplace, an adjoin-

ing lavatory with hot and cold water, a closet with wines and tinned food of various sorts, a long table, easy-chairs and Persian carpets—that it gave no evidence whatever of being the strong-room which it really was. The scientifically perfect ventilating system could be operated by storage-batteries in the wall of the vault itself, if necessary.

Seating the Viscount at the table, Trevor fetched a number of share certificates and other securities from one of the steel files and spread them before his guest.

"There, Jimmy! . . . . I've endorsed these over to you, as you see. Altogether, they run to around two hundred and twenty thousand pounds—something over a million in American money. And here is the contract you are to sign, giving me exclusive use of the Aylesworth metal until it is sold to the British Governm'nt at some future time—no Labor Cabinet will buy it. In that event, you are to receive from said Governm'nt eight hundred thousand more—but you are to deliver for that sum your formula for the metal which you now hold as your own property in your Chancery Lane safety-vault, with a key for decoding the cipher in which it is written. Am I right—is all this according to your understanding of our agreem'nt?"

"Quite so, Your Lordship. And I much appreciate your kindness in carrying it out. While I've a very fair income of my own, this two hundred an' twenty thousand will make quite a diff'rence in my circumst'nces; it will put me in position to go ahead with something I wish very much to do."

THE Earl glanced at his young friend—and smiled.

"Jimmy, you and Byl have known each other since you were children—you've always been good pals, as far as I've observed. Is that still the case? Or—er—"

"Fancy your suspectin' anything of the sort, sir! . . . . One had no idea there was much evidence of it, you know. Byl's interested in my work—always has been. I'd no idea that she'd anything else in mind until recently. Of course I was in no position, financially, to suggest anything of the sort, d'ye see, no matter how much I fancied her. But the other day she got me in a corner an' pinned me down until I had to admit that I couldn't see any other girl in the world an' that if I couldn't have her some day my apple was all wormy."

"Aye—Byl would! Er—what did you say to that?"

"Why, I sort of hinted that if you closed this deal tonight, I fancied next week would be about right—"

"I'm betting that never even jarred her! What?"

"Not that I noticed, sir. She said she could have a wedding-gown ready next week an' wouldn't bother about anything else. Her idea was to be married in St. George's, with a reception an' dance in Park Lane that evening; then fly down here from Croydon an' board the yacht—if she can borrow it from you for a few weeks—an' disappear over the horizon. She'll have her secretary phone invitations tomorrow."

"Jimmy—Byl's mother and I are tickled pink! Go to it, boy—we'll stand by with any assistance you need! But there's something I want to go over with you during the next two or three hours that'll not wait even for a wedding. We'll go over the skeleton of it down here where nobody can interrupt us or get a glimmering of what we're at."

Something in the Earl's manner and intensity of his look stirred the younger man.

"I'll be vastly int'rested to hear anything you've in mind, sir. Aye—an' I hope you can find me useful in some way!"

"You're the first chap I mean to find useful—but you'll have two or three competitors, I fancy, because I'm in too much of a hurry to chance a long wait while one is working the problem out. You've got, in the Aylesworth metal, something stronger than steel and lighter in weight than aluminum—which puts every other known metal on the scrap-heap for commercial use. Everyone who sees what it will do must admit that without argum'nt. As a chemist an' metallurgist, you're fairly certain that nothing else in the same class is likely to be developed in the next fifty years. But I'm saying, now, that your metal is merely the beginning of what I mean to have you get before I pass out, if it's within human or chemical possibility — and I'm convinced that it is. In case you get what I want, the Aylesworth metal will be to an appreciable extent outclassed. You've got a quarter-million out of that—but there isn't much limit to what you'll get from the new discovery. Aside from building planes from your metal, to my order, as we go along, is there anything against your chucking every other activity and concentrating on what I want you to do at, say, twenty thousand pounds a year—and a million, sterling, if you produce what I want—the million to be split with any other metallurgist who works

it out for me within the same month? Will you work for me on those terms—under my direction—until you succeed?"

"Provided I consider your requirem'nt possible, sir—yes. I'll be keen to try it out! On the other hand, if convinced it's an impossibility, I'll not waste time on it."

"Would you have said ten years ago the Aylesworth metal was an impossibility?"

"Well—perhaps. An' yet I'm not so sure. Given a practical way of isolating certain chemical elements, I'd have said it was not quite impossible—but I'll admit I'd little hope of getting it."

"With your scientific knowledge would you say that anything is really impossible?"

"H-m-m—there are propositions, of course, which on the face of them would appear impossible, because there has been so much demonstration in their lines that all the reactions are supposed to be known—particularly in chemistry an' metallurgy. Still an' all, if something of the sort happened to be an obsession with one—if he had the money to procure anything there is in existence for his experimentation—his determination to accomplish the result would really carry him much farther than the average scientist who was but mildly interested. Are you willing to give me some hint of what you're after?"

"Naturally. What I want is a metal with very nearly the strength of yours—but a specific gravity of point-triple 0-one-eight—reckoning air in vacuum as 'one.'"

"A solid stronger than steel but weighing no more than helium, which is a gas—to put it a bit more simply? On the face of it, *napoo!* No can do! The lightest known solid today is lithium, which is soft enough to be cut with a knife, weighs half as much as fresh water at the temperature of melting ice, melts at one-eighty-six degrees centigrade—is four hundred an' ninety-two times heavier than air (weighed in vacuum)—which is point-three 0-five grains to the cubic inch. An' you want something—strong enough, I infer, to stand any sort of strain a plane is subjected to—not only four hundred an' ninety-two times lighter than lithium, but only eighteen one-hundred-thousandths of *that*, which is going some—if you ask me! Solidified argon would be lighter than lithium, but not practical to work as a solid."

"SOUNDS a bit staggering, old chap, when you make the comparison in figures, like that," Trevor observed, "but don't overlook the fact that it's quite as easy to reckon billions in figures as it is units. If, for example, you compare lithium at one end of the solid chemical elements and osmium at the heavy end, you get a staggering difference right there among the known solids. Lithium weighs thirty-seven pounds to the cubic foot—osmium, fourteen hundred an' three, or forty times as much. If a cubic foot of osmium fell from the top of a bookcase on the upper floor of an average house, it would smash through every floor to the cellar—weighing, as it does, over half a ton. At one end of the chemical scale you have hydrogen, with a density but eighty-nine one-millionths that of air—at the other end osmium, with a density of twenty-two-point-forty-eight that of water, which weighs sixty-two and two-fifths pounds per cubic foot, or about twelve hundred times more than air.

"You see, Jimmy, I'm not asking for much wider differences in density or weight than already exist in the scale of chemical elements. I make no pretense at any real knowledge of chemistry or of metallurgy. What little I've been able to assimilate has been dropped by scientists in technical conversation which is mostly over my head. I'm likely to make statem'nts or ask questions which, to a scientist, sound ridiculous. But I'm after a certain object which I mean to attain if I live long enough, because I'm convinced that it will be obtained sooner or later and that it will tend to revolutionize human activities when it is worked out. I'm a fairly good electrical engineer and mechanic; I've experimented, some, in reducing ores—and in the action of high-tension currents when passed through various metals at high temperatures. Where I fancy we may get a bit of light is by obtaining molecular changes in substances which are being subjected to very high voltage. I had some thought of impregnating a light solid with hydrogen, helium or argon under very heavy atmospheric pressure—but the tendency of most gases is to liquefy in a compressor when you go far enough with the pressure."

"An' when you get a chemical element lighter than air you get a gas—not a solid."

"Suppose a solid, or one of the lighter metals, could be treated in some way to make it strongly radio-active against gravity? Then you would have the paradox of a solid much heavier than air possessing properties which apparently make it much lighter than air. Eh?"

"You're supposing quite a lot, sir! How could you possibly make any solid sufficiently radio-active against gravity to float above ground in the air?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, Jimmy. That's what I want you—and a few other men—to produce for me. Now consider a bit. It is known that ninety-one chemical elements exist—but up to this time only eighty-eight have been isolated. I consider it quite possible that one of those missing elements may come pretty close to showing the properties I'm after. Any objections to that theory? Any reason for saying positively *no?*"

A section of the flooring slid back, revealing a circular stair leading into the rocky cliff.

"Merely the known properties of the elements already isolated. Six of them are gases lighter than air. One is a gas which can be solidified until it is slightly heavier than air. Bromine an' mercury are liquids. Seventeen are metalloids, or non-metallic solids. All the rest are metals. Anything lighter than air means less density, or specific gravity, than air; anything heavier means more density. Of course if you could get a radio-activity sufficiently repellent against gravity, your proposition would be entirely possible. But it's ridiculous on the face of it!"

"So was talking to a person twelve thousand miles through the air without wires or any visible connection, just a few years ago. I don't want to experiment with radium except as a last resort—we'd be too likely to kill some valuable men we can't spare—"

"Not necessarily, sir. But suppose that you work out some way ot producing certain forms of radio-activity with high-tension electric current, yet without actually using radium-chlorid at all? On the face of it, I'd say it can't be done. An' yet I wouldn't swear to it, at that! This whole proposition of yours is getting up to atmospheric possibilities which no metallurgist has yet explored. My word, sir—you'll have me going, presently!"

"Suppose you decided to start in on this for me, old chap—what sort of stuff would you want for experimentation?"

"Oh—five hundred tons of pitchblende residuum; a lot of barium-chlorids; a lot of the alkaline earths—calcium and strontium; quite a lot of silicon, an' some of its compounds. I don't fancy I'd tackle the electric end of the proposition for a while—I'd have to dig up a lot on it—"

"THAT brings us to another detail in my idea," said His Lordship. "Is there any man in the United Kingdom or the Territories who has forgotten more about electro-metallurgy and various applications of electricity than other men will ever know?"

"Hmph—odd that you should ask that question—the man popped into my mind just a second before! Aye—Randal Porchester, as an electro-metallurgist, hasn't an equal in Europe, to the best of my knowledge. Peculiar chap—dev'lish hard up at first, until the Varsities began to hear about the results he'd obtained. Then some of the big commercial promoters took him up. In five years they paid him over a hundred thousand pounds, which he considers independence for life. Now he simply refuses to work upon any commercial proposition. He fitted up a first-class laboratory for himself at his house down on the Sussex coast, and only experiments upon what int'rests him from time to time. I happen to know that he may strike something in electricity which will be as epoch-making as the Hertzian waves."

"Would twenty thousand a year tempt him to work along just the electrical lines, alone, for me? Suppose we go to him and say: 'Here's something in your line which, obviously, would seem impossible—producing radio-activity which is highly repellent against gravitation, in some metal or solid, with high tensile strength.' Fancy that might catch him?"

"Well—the seeming impossibility might."

"Very good! . . . . We'll have him—one way or another. An' we'll not tell him the result he's to produce is but a part of the object we're after. Next—who's the man who knows more about lithium and the silicates than anyone else?"

"Schmoltz of Vienna would be one of them—but I fancy you're not considering anybody who isn't British. Eh? Well—I'd say that Auchterlony of Edinburgh is a shade better than Schmoltz, if anything."

"We'll nab him too. Then—the man who works over pumice, obsidian, and the igneous rocks, in his sleep?"

"A Welshman—Merthyr David—one of the greatest living geologists an' geological chemists. Comparatively poor, too."

"And the best all-round elementary chemist—doing research work on the side?"

"Gordon Smith. He has a fine laboratory of his own just beyond Kew—an' hopes some day to isolate one of the three missing elements."

"That's four besides yourself, if we get them all—as I fancy we may. What I have in mind is working it out in this way: Get all of those men down at Trevor Hall with the most completely equipped laboratories money will buy, and unlimited materials to work with—then have each man dig along the lines of his own specialty, telling him we want to get a certain result in his line. He gets twenty thousand for one year—renewable if he works longer for us—an' fifty thousand if he produces what we ask. Merely as a jest—apparently with no belief that such a thing is possible—we say that if, just by accident, he strikes something with the strength of steel and the density of helium, we'll give him a million; unless one of the other four gets the same result within a month—then they split the million. But there must be no comparison of work between them unless in conference with us—no mention whatever outside of Trevor Hall as to what they're working on or what we've agreed to pay for. It seems to me that you will be able to judge from examining what they've done each week which of the lot possibly may be on the right track. If you come to any such conclusion, of course, it will be only fair to tell him in confidence what we really do want—so that he'll have the same chance that you have. You see—it struck me that by having five of you, working along what you tell me are at least possible lines of investigation, we're likely to get somewhere at least five times as fast as if we set but one first-class man to experimenting for something he would consider practically impossible at the start. Now just agree to start in on this as soon as you get back, my boy, and then forget everything I've said. You can give me notes to each of those four men, and I'll talk with 'em while you're away. I can also be fitting up the separate lab's for 'em and getting down whatever supplies they want to begin on."

NEXT morning, Earl Trevor motored over into Sussex, locating Doctor Porchester's home on the cliffs twenty miles west

of Brighton at about three o'clock, and fortunately found the scientist at home. As everything Porchester read or heard of His Lordship had impressed him very favorably for several years, he was immensely pleased that such a man—a world-wide celebrity—should have taken the trouble to hunt him up. He showed Trevor through every part of the laboratory he had constructed in the rear of his house—which led to his describing some of the results he'd obtained.

"Have you as complete equipm'nt, here, as you need for everything you have in mind, Doctor?" Trevor asked.

"Well—no. I've gotten together what would be considered a very good electro-metallurgic lab—but in using it there is always the itch to go much further than the equipm'nt permits. For a year I've had in mind a few things I'd like to try out with a two- or three-million-volt current. But the generators an' other equipm'nt I'd need to conduct such experim'nts with any safety would run to at least two-thirds of all the money I have in the world—and in middle age, one doesn't like to part with his sheet-anchor, even for pet dreams."

"Doctor Porchester," said Trevor frankly, "aside from the pleasure of making your acquaintance, I had a secondary object in looking you up just now. Brantford—whom you know and, I fancy, like pretty well—is coming into the family next week, and he will be working with me on something I hope to get before I die. Now—suppose that you had *carte-blanche* to spend all the money needed on the most completely equipped, up-to-date laboratory for not only your own line of work but other lines closely related to it—the cost no consideration whatever—everything under your personal charge—no interference with it by anybody—would you be willing to spend a year down at my place in Devon as my guest, working out my suggestions, in such a laboratory? Brantford says that money is no longer an inducement to you—but the proposition would carry twenty thousand a year and a bonus of fifty thousand if you succeed in getting what I want. Added to that, the laboratory would be restricted to your sole use as long as you live and care to work in it. Eh?"

"Oh, man! . . . . Ye're temptin' me, I'll admit! An' not with the money, either—though that is more than generous. But it's the way I've heard ye have of doin' things—on a big scale. What is it ye might be wanting now?"

"A solid with sufficiently high radio-activity to repel gravitation, absolutely—or a solid of high tensile strength and the weight of helium."

"Man, ye're jokin'—of course!"

"Well—about as much as Roëntgen was joking with his friends and other scientists before he worked out his ray—or Marconi, before he talked across the Atlantic without wires or any physical connection!"

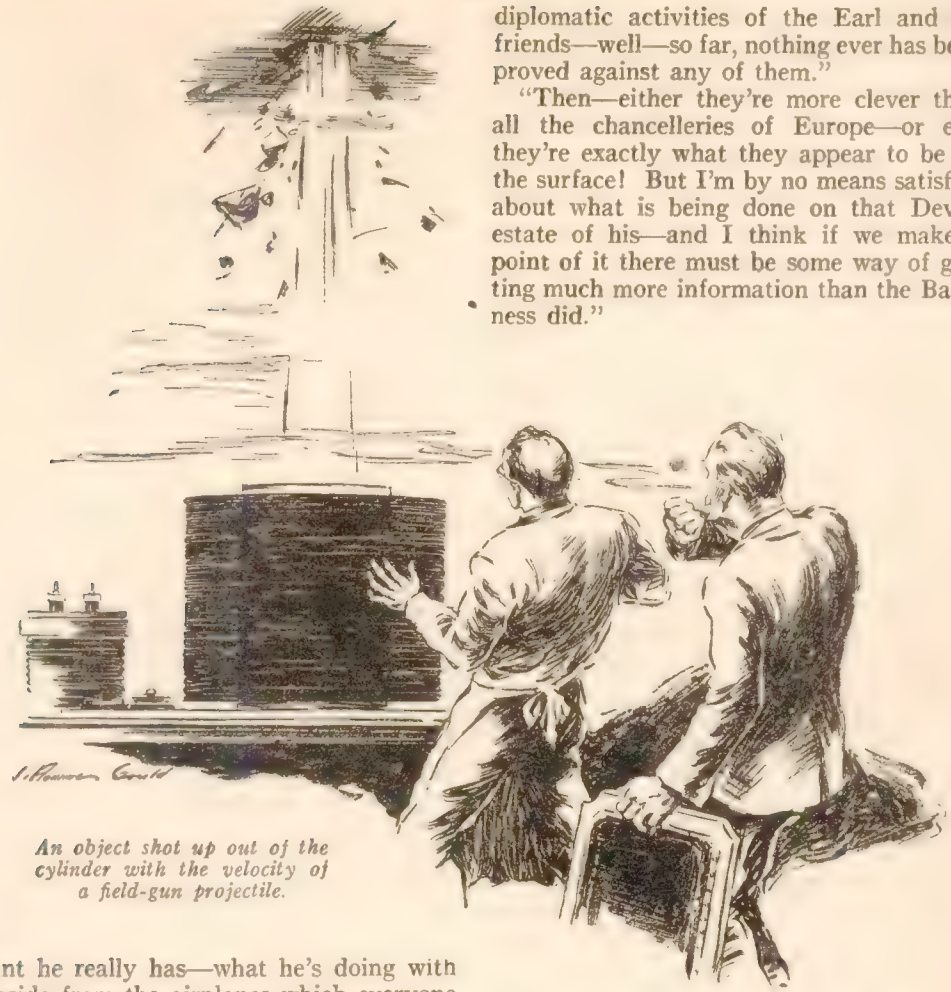
"But—but—"

"You get generators that will produce at least five million volts—and other equipm'nt which utilized by your brains will produce results never before obtained. Who can say where you will have to stop?"

"I'm tellin' ye frankly that any chemist in the world would consider us clean daft even to attempt anything as absurd on the face of it—accordin' to what is known of chemistry an' metals. But if, after that statem'nt from me, ye're still of a mind to go into it with yon wonder-lab ye're describin'—well—I've not the moral courage to refuse. Indeed, ye tempt me, sir!"

PERHAPS a week later, four men were seated around a table in Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin, discussing a syndicated article in *Der Tageblatt* which all of them had read that morning, concerning the farsightedness of a certain wealthy Earl in England who recently had secured the services of four leading scientists at fabulous salaries to work out certain problems of the industrial corporations in which he was interested.

"It's really no more than our own industrial leaders are doing, you know, Von Schelling—just plain common-sense in buying the best available brains for the experimentation his companies have to do. But I don't know how many times in the past twenty years this same Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint has been suspected of secret diplomatic activities—a very far-reaching sort, at that. You see it's entirely possible that one or two of those scientists he's employing, openly, for industrial experiments, may at any time work out some epoch-making discovery which has an incalculable war-value—and Trevor wouldn't hesitate a moment in paying him a million, sterling, for it. He'd pay more than any Government would at the start—pay it with no haggling, red-tape, or delay—and those scientists are quite well aware of that fact. In my opinion, we really should know without any question just what is being done on that Devon estate of his—how much of a



An object shot up out of the cylinder with the velocity of a field-gun projectile.

plant he really has—what he's doing with it aside from the airplanes which everyone knows are a hobby with him. He has a sixteen-foot concrete wall surrounding the entire estate, and signs painted on the outside warn everybody that it is protected with high-tension current. His guests and their servants have to stay there under certain restrictions. Well—no point in all that unless he has *something* to conceal—something probably amazing!"

"*Ja!* Baroness Hilda von Tannenberg spent a week-end there two years ago; she kept her eyes open and strolled about the place until she was turned back at one point or another. She said there were undoubtedly machine-shops and a laboratory somewhere in the densely wooded part of the estate, but that from the number of workmen she saw about in one corner or another, the whole plant wasn't big enough to handle more than one or two planes at a time or do more than a certain amount of chemical experimenting. As for those suspected diplomatic activities of the Earl and his friends—well—so far, nothing ever has been proved against any of them."

"Then—either they're more clever than all the chancelleries of Europe—or else they're exactly what they appear to be on the surface! But I'm by no means satisfied about what is being done on that Devon estate of his—and I think if we make a point of it there must be some way of getting much more information than the Baroness did."

"How—for example? The place is understood to have the status of an Army Post under Government protection."

"For half a mile along the road which bounds one side of that estate, there are several hundred acres of thickly wooded land—a continuation of the forest inside the wall. If one leased a couple of hundred acres with shooting privileges—or, claiming to be a naturalist, built a small bungalow in the thickest part of it, near the road, he could tunnel under that road and wall—come up in the forest of the estate itself beyond those high-tension wires. Eh?"

"*Donner!* It iss an idea, that! You would try it yourself, Max? Yes?"

AT the time the Earl of Dyvnaint—then Sir George Trevor—bought back the estate which his ancestors had gambled out of the family during the reign of George

IV, he had certain rather vague ideas in the way of developing it. At the end of six years these ideas had assumed more definite shape, after he had decided upon carrying out certain experiments as a pastime. A primary requirement was absolute secrecy as far as it might be insured—which suggested the high concrete wall and its electric protection. As something over two-thirds of the property was covered with thick primeval forest, the heart of it was obviously the ideal place for his experimental plant. But he went considerably further than that in the way of concealment.

The estate, overlooking the English Channel, lies along the top of Scabbacombe Cliffs, which from six to twenty feet below the top-soil are solid rock. So without disturbing the trees he had a shaft sunk into the rock to a depth of sixty feet. Radiating from the bottom of this shaft like the spokes of a wheel, some twenty tunnels were driven as far as the outer edge of a circle four hundred feet in diameter—each tunnel ending in a rock chamber large enough for a fully equipped laboratory, machine-shop or engine-room—some of them thirty by sixty feet, with ceilings thirty-five feet above the floor, so that there was a thickness of five feet in the overhead rock between the ceiling and the twenty feet of earth in which the forest trees were growing. Near the central shaft a beautifully designed obelisk, fifty feet square and tapering to twenty feet at the top, rose two hundred feet above the ground in the midst of the foliage—acting as a chimney for each of the rock-chambers, but looking like an artistic war-memorial, with a patent smoke-consumer preventing any noticeable vapor from betraying its actual purpose. The flues connecting the furnace of each chamber with it were cut into the ceiling of each lateral tunnel where they were available for repairs along their entire length, yet altogether out of the way.

In the farther side of each rock chamber was another tunnel fifty feet long, ending at a shaft in which a circular iron stairway went up to a small concrete hut in the forest. This was used as a means of escape in case of fire or the liberation of deadly gases which made it impossible to reach the big central shaft with its two lifts, each of which was large enough to carry an eight-ton motor-lorry. The escape-tunnels and the main lateral tunnels—parts of the ventilating system—were protected by steel doors with combination-locks so that nobody could get through into the rock chambers unless he knew at least three combinations or had time and opportunity for cutting out the locks with oxy-acetylene torches. Guards on duty night and day made this risk practically negligible.

The masts and aërials of the radio beam-station—radiating three-quarters of a mile in six directions—rose two hundred feet above the tops of the streets, but their skeleton-construction was so light that, from an airplane—the only viewpoint from which they could be seen—it would have taken a very powerful glass or very low altitude to make them out at all. The dome—with a sixty-foot revolving cantilever arm for the outer lenses—of the reflecting beam-transmitter projected eighty feet above the tops of the trees, all of the valves, panels and generators being in a separate rock chamber underneath its base. A concrete runway one hundred fifty feet wide had been cut for nearly a mile through the forest to the cliff-brow, for airplanes taking off or landing. And at the inner end of this was a row of concrete barracks and hangars—somewhat lower than the tops of the trees—which also were used as airplane assembling-shops, all of the parts being constructed underground. As the level of the estate along the top of the cliffs was higher than any of the surrounding country, nothing could be seen of what might be going on within the walls except from a plane in the air. From such a plane, the only visible evidences of the activities below are the take-off runway, if one happens to be just over it, the roofs of the hangars and barracks at the inner end, the chimney obelisk—which doesn't in the least appear to be what it really is—and the dome of the reflecting-station. Away at the south end of the estate is Trevor Hall, with the terraces and open ground surrounding it.

BY one sort of argument or another, the Earl persuaded Professors Auchterlony of Edinburgh, Merthyr David of Cardiff, and Gordon Smith of London University to find other men who would substitute for them in their lectures, and then accept his proposition for work in the Devon laboratories during a period of one to five years. In four months from the time he really started, the five men—including Viscount Brantford, now the Earl's son-in-law—were at work in laboratories containing everything they could possibly think of in the way of equipment or working materials.

With his various sources of information, Trevor learned that a Scotch naturalist had leased two hundred acres of woodland on part of the adjoining property, and had run up a rough unplastered bungalow for his biological work. This seemed innocent enough—but His Lordship had two of his men keep the naturalist under close espionage—and learned from them that the man was doing a lot of excavating under his bungalow. After that report, the espionage was even more strictly kept.

ODDLY enough, it was Doctor Auchterlony who first produced, quite by accident, something which the Earl instinctively thought might be a step in the right direction. Auchterlony worked best at night—though he admitted that in those soundless underground chambers, by electric light, one hour was much like any other. His Lordship had gone down with him after dinner to watch a fusing from which the scientist expected certain results. On the long bench with various other specimens, there was a partly translucent cube of something which the Earl picked up curiously. It looked as if it would weigh about the same as the glass bull's-eye of a sidewalk grating. But to his amazement it seemed to weigh rather less than a similar block of magnesium or chalk.

"I say, Doctor!" he exclaimed. "What the devil have you here? What's this stuff? How strong is it?"

"Weel—it'll hae fairly strong properties, ye mind—but its possibeelities stop there. It presents aboot its limit in lightness. I'll no' say it hasna strength enough for manufacturin' use—for ye may bounce it upon the floor wi'oot chippin' or crackin'—an' it'll no' smash easily under a hammer. But in the line of specific grravity, I've gone as far as the stuff'll be made to work oot, d'ye see."

"What's it made of?"

"In the beginning, forbye, there wair a matter of forty percent solidified argon—then there wair silicates of one sort or anither, an' mair stuff as matrix."

"But don't you know the exact proportions and figures? Can you reproduce it?"

"Oh—aye. There'll be mebbe a large container fu' of the stuff which I made for experimental purposes—an' my calculations air always set doon in my note-books, which I presairve most carefully. For anything in which ye may find it usefu', I can reproduce it in quantity at any time."

"How expensive would it be?"

"Weel—I'd no' figured the expense, as yet. Posseebly twenty poonds for the container-fu' I hae the noo—but ye'll obsairve that is merely experimental production. It micht be less in quantity."

"If you've no objections, Doctor, I'd like to see what Porchester can do with this, electrically. He'll have no knowledge of how you produced it—probably mightn't duplicate the stuff in a year of experimenting. But I'd like to have him go on from where it is now and see if he can get any further with it. What?"

"Oh, aye—of course! I'll be pleased to mak' as much as ye weesh o' the stuff."

Phoning to the Hall, Trevor had Porchester down in his own big laboratory—the largest of all, with a motor-chamber adjoining—in twenty minutes. On the big work-bench there were various pieces of Auchterlony's new "solid"—some in the form of cubes, two to six inches square—some in one-inch bars a foot long.

Porchester picked up one of the bars, examining it in a strong light.

"What the devil *is* the stuff? Partly silicates—judging from the semi-translucency! What do ye wish me to do with it, sir?"

"Consider it raw material an' go on from there—electrically. Auchterlony says he can reproduce it in quantity, any time—and that there's solidified argon in it—"

"Moonshine! He was pulling your leg!"

"Quite possibly—though I doubt it. As long as he can reproduce it and will sell me the formula—for a price—what diff'rence does it make how he got it? He attaches no value to the stuff himself—says he's reached its limit in density, so that it's useless for what I asked him to get."

Porchester dropped a two-inch cube on the floor from a height of three feet, and saw it rebound over ten feet in the air without a trace of chipping.

"H-m-m—lighter than magnesium—and high resiliency. If there's enough silicate, it's a non-conductor. We'll test that first!"

LAYING one end of the bar on the positive binding-post of a forty-five-volt battery, he touched one wire from a voltmeter to the negative post and the other wire to the opposite end of the bar. The needle didn't even tremble—apparently there wasn't a trace of current passing through the bar. Then Porchester wound thirty or more turns of insulated wire around the middle of the bar, attaching

both ends to the battery—and touched the wires from the voltmeter to the ends of the bar. This time the needle shot past the "45" mark supposed to be the maximum capacity of the battery and registered an even hundred volts of induced, secondary current—which made Porchester stare in utter amazement.

"Now that's odd—dev'lish odd! Glass or most any of the silicates are absolute non-conductors to chemical electricity—you can't force it through their mass. Yet a glass disc revolved between cushions produces enough dynamic—surface—electricity to spark a Leyden jar. A secondary current set up by induction has, almost invariably, lower voltage than the primary current which produces it—but some inherent property in this stuff makes the secondary, induced current, about double the voltage there is in that little battery!"

The Doctor connected the terminals of a big fine-wire coil, wound around a thick bakelite sleeve, to a small dynamo, and started it running slowly—the coil having a resistance of ten thousand ohms. Shoving the bar through the bakelite sleeve, he rested its ends upon blocks of wood so that it nowhere touched the surrounding bakelite or coil—having previously connected a length of wire to each end. He put on rubber gloves, and handling it with a pair of insulated pliers, he shoved the scraped end of one wire into the snap-connection of a Leyden jar which was connected in series with nineteen others—then approached the other wire slowly toward the opposite pole of the coupled jars. In a second or two, a ten-inch spark jumped from the end of the wire with a report like a gunshot. Shutting off the dynamo and taking the bar out of the coil, he examined its texture—balancing its weight upon his rubber glove.

"My word, sir—you an' Auchterlony have got me guessing this time! I never saw any substance act like that before! Why, man dear—there was no particle of current passin' through the mass of yon bar, yet with that ten-thousand-ohm coil, I produced along its surface about a thousand times the dynamic energy you'd get from a far larger bit of glass! There's simply no sense to it! —Wait a bit—it can't be possible, but we'll just see!"

He tossed the bar up into the air—but it didn't go a foot—and slowly floated to the floor like a feather. Placing a box upon the bench and climbing upon it so that his hands were ten feet above the floor he dropped a bar which had not been tested at the same instant with the one which had. One fell to the floor as rapidly as any light solid—the other, fully five seconds after it.

"Great Caesar! We'll know tomorrow whether the result of induced current in that stuff is permanent or likely to disappear. If it's permanent, the next question is how far we can go in the way of making it repellent to gravity. If we get it down so it acts like the density of helium, we must then test for tensile strength—see whether the induced current destroys that or not. It's likely to in some metals—though from what you say, this isn't a metal at all. Beyond that, we must find what risk there may be in handlin' the stuff. Got a pig? Phone for a good healthy guinea-pig to be fetched here at once in some sort of cage he'll not get out of. We'll just put this bar of the stuff in the cage with him an' see how he feels tomorrow. Then I'll be goin' back to the Hall—puttin' myself in bed. Tomorrow, I'll get busy on this stuff with electric force so dev'lish powerful that there'll be some risk for anyone stayin' here while I work. Yon pet generators ye got for me are fearsome things if ye make one little careless mistake in handlin' 'em—a bolt of lightnin' is no quicker death!"

IN the morning the Doctor's first act was to examine the pig, which apparently had experienced no ill effects whatever—its pink skin showing no evidence of radio-burning under the hair. It now took the bar seven seconds to reach the floor from a ten-foot height—the effect of the current seemed to be on the increase, rather than the other way. Clamping it in a vise, he made tests for its molecular composition with a file and various acids.

The scientist was clearly puzzled. Some of the expected reactions he obtained at once—others, not at all. The stuff differed materially from anything he had seen or heard of. Presently he went over to a large table supporting a coil of No. 14 insulated copper wire wound upon a glass cylinder three feet high, two feet in diameter and two inches in thickness—resting upon a thick marble slab into which several double-throw switches had been screwed. As the surrounding coil of wire was the same three feet in height, and twenty inches in thickness, the amount of induction obtained with a high-voltage current passing through it may be imagined by any-

The man was permitted to finish his tunnel and come up in the Trevor woods one night.

one with some knowledge of dynamic electricity. Bolted to the marble in the center of the glass cylinder was a vulcanized rubber block, twelve inches square and eighteen high, with bronze staples on each side for woven-cotton fastening-straps. Picking up a six-inch cube of the new solid, Porchester considered a moment—then said:

"I've no definite idea what may happen with this—but I'm going to fasten it with a few strands of marlin instead of the cotton straps I generally use when I'm in doubt as to a certain effect. Better stand well over at the other side of the room, sir!"

Stepping into the adjoining motor-room, he started up a large generator—then came back to the big coil and pushed over one of the jackknife switches. In a moment there was a low hum, which gradually increased in pitch until the whole rock chamber throbbed with it. Standing upon a wooden block, Porchester was looking down upon the six-inch cube inside the glass cylinder. In less than three minutes he noticed that the strands of marlin holding it were strained until they were rigid. Ten seconds later he quickly switched off the current—ran into the motor-room and stopped the generator—then was back, standing by the Earl, in less than thirty seconds. In the succeeding intense stillness, they distinctly heard the snapping of tiny hemp fibers in the marlin—then with a loud crack like that of an Australian whip, the strands let go. An object shot up out of the glass cylinder with the velocity of a field-gun projectile—penetrating the ceiling for nearly a foot and scattering bits of rock all over the chamber.

"My word! If we try to drill an' cut that cube out of the hole it made in the rock, it'll take some doing—working on scaffolding thirty-five feet above the floor! Fancy we'd best let it stay where it is! Now I'm going to fasten four of those twelve-inch bars securely to that block with the cotton straps and give 'em but two-an'-a-half minutes of the current. Then we'll see if we can handle them."

AFTER this was done, Porchester extracted one of the bars from under the cotton straps—barely managing to hold it in his rubber-protected hands, so powerful was the upward pull. Motioning toward a fiber container with a screw-top under one of the benches, he asked Trevor to remove the cover. Then he held the container between his legs, inverted—let the bar jump up into it—and screwed the cover fast. But when it slipped away from him, the container remained in the air three feet above the floor, the upward pull of the enclosed bar just about neutralizing the four-pound weight of the container. Up to eight feet, the container remained at whatever height they placed it in the air. At twelve feet, it slowly sank until it floated between five

and six feet. As the bar was an inch square and a foot long, they now had a ratio of twelve cubic inches of the induction-treated solid supporting a dead weight of four pounds in air as a liquid. Porchester said further experiments with the solid would determine exactly at what varying heights above ground different-length exposures to induction would make the twelve cubic inches support the four pounds.

HIS next experiment was to slip a bar into the inverted container on the edge of the work-bench, while Earl Trevor sat on it—then fasten a rope to the handle, and let go of it. Had both of them not been easing up the rope through their hands, the container would have been smashed by the force with which it started for the ceiling—it took their body-weight to pull it down again. Going up in the lift, they got into one of the new planes, which His Lordship took aloft until they reached twelve thousand feet altitude. Here they unscrewed the container-cover and eased out the two bars—which immediately soared upward until they entirely disappeared. At just what height they would reach a stratum of equilibrium, it was impossible to say—but with sufficient exposure to such powerful induction, the Doctor was of the opinion that they would rise out of the earth's forty-five-mile envelope of atmosphere.

"There's one thing obvious—we'll not find it practical to handle the stuff with more than a three-minute exposure to the current. If we find it holds its gravity-repelling qualities indefinitely, it'll be merely the question of bolting with thumbscrews enough two-by-twelve plates, half an inch thick, to whatever you wish to lift—simply adding additional pairs of plates until the object floats off the ground. Constructing an airplane entirely of this solid would be simply out of the question, because a reduction of fuel or any other load, at any altitude, would simply result in sending your boat up-an'-up until there'd be no possibility of gettin' her down again. By using the lifting-power of this stuff in small plates, fastened with thumbscrews, you can equalize the lifting-power at any altitude by simply unfastening an' throwing out a few plates which never would fall to the ground. Of course it's merely so much algebra figuring out the heights at which a given number of plates will neutralize an' keep the plane afloat, motionless, in mid-air—an' I'll caution you now, sir, never to leave the ground with full neutralization at that level—because, with your ailerons an' rudders, you'll be able to neutralize an' float anywhere within thousand-foot strata-limits by the manipulation of your plane alone. We're by no means certain as yet of what we have worked out—I'll want at least a fortn't more of experimentin' before I'm sure, as a scientist. But I'm hopin'."

Meanwhile, the Wilhelmstrasse man was permitted to finish his tunnel—to come up in the Trevor woods one night, and prowl through them to the hundred-foot-square building over the big central shaft, which he couldn't enter because it was too well guarded, but assumed to be either a machine-shop or laboratory or combination of both. He also got a casual look at the airplane runway, the hangars and assembling-shop. Then he was chased back to his hole in the ground. Next morning, he was arrested by one of the local constables upon a charge of burglariously entering the Trevor estate—but as His Lordship refused to prosecute, the man was warned by the magistrate to leave the county and not enter it again under penalty of immediate arrest. He had seen only what the Earl was perfectly willing to have him see!

SHORTLY after the conclusive tests had been made, Earl Trevor ran up with the Countess for an audience with the King at Windsor. He described to His Majesty the idea he'd had in mind and the progressive steps by which the discovery had been worked out. The King was frankly skeptical, but intensely interested none the less. Presently he expressed a desire to see the new plane in the air; finally he agreed to spend a week-end at Trevor Hall accompanied by two of his equerries—General Lord Ferningham, Commander-in-Chief of the Army—and General Sir Thomas Massiter, Chief of the Royal Air Force. His Majesty had been at the Trevor mansion in Park Lane upon more than one occasion, but never had seen the Devon estate of which he had heard a good deal from time to time. To avoid observation and comment in the news-sheets, the party motored down with His Lordship in two of the Trevor cars.

Next morning the party were driven down through the forest to inspect everything that could be seen above ground—His Majesty and the Earl going down to the laboratories and shops, below, unaccompanied. Then the "mystery plane" was

wheeled out of its hangar onto the runway and carefully inspected by all of the visitors. General Massiter noticed and called the others' attention to the lining of small plates bolted to the fuselage—but aside from that he could see nothing materially different from the latest type of Trevor amphibians. The plane was off the ground within three hundred feet. At a quarter-mile distance, it was spiraling up—already with ten thousand feet of altitude—and in eight minutes more was out of sight. In a few moments they saw it coming down again in very short volplanes—almost a perpendicular descent. At two hundred feet above the ground, it flattened out and stopped, with a few reverse turns of the propellers to keep it in one spot over their heads. The Army Chiefs knew there were no helicopter features about the ship—no lateral propellers—had called His Majesty's attention to this. Searching every foot of the craft with their powerful prism-binoculars, they were convinced that each propeller was absolutely motionless—that there was no possible space in it where a container filled with lifting-gas might be concealed. The entire party were simply amazed—and no man with red blood in him could pass up the opportunity for going up in that plane after seeing what they had seen. His Lordship assured them that the ship simply couldn't crash.

When it was up again Trevor, at the controls, took it out over the waters of the Channel off Scabbacombe Cliffs and eased it down to not more than a hundred feet above the water—where it floated, motionless, in the air. He took it up to forty thousand feet—being careful to get an altimeter record as he did so—and expressed the opinion that altitude limitation was merely a question of what human lungs and bodies could stand, inasmuch as all the working parts of the plane could be protected against freezing.

When the plane came down at the hangars, Trevor's mechanics—much to his guests' surprise—began removing all of the "mystery plates" from it and taking them underground to one of the unoccupied laboratories where a large supply of the finished metal in various shapes and sizes had been stored.

The party were rather silent going back to the Hall—they were considering the amazing demonstration they had witnessed. His Lordship noticeably avoided discussion during dinner—but afterward, when they were smoking in his private study with the doors closed, he gave them his reasons.

"You are thinking, gentlemen, that you may have dreamed what you saw. This discovery we have worked out is so revolutionary in its effect upon every human industry—every branch of mechanics—that if it became generally known at present, all of us would be tortured and killed to obtain the secret—every chemist and metallurgist in the world would be working night and day until they stumbled upon something approximating it. The secret would become generally known and His Majesty's Governm'nt would lose the advantage of it.

"Considering all these points, my scientists have agreed with me upon what seems the only advisable course. No one of them has complete knowledge of how this amazing metal is produced—it takes a combination of three different formulas to complete the process. The formulas have been most securely locked up in a place of concealm'nt known only to myself, my son, and my son-in-law. It is our intention privately to communicate the secret of this place of concealment to His Majesty and the Prince—to be handed on to the succeeding Prince of Wales at the end of each reign. Then when the time comes—as it naturally will, human nature being what it is—when England finds herself at war against overwhelming forces, the metal and the planes using it will be available—with an advantage so great that nothing can stand against it!"

IN a secluded corner of a Paris café where diplomats and secret-service men often exchanged confidences which were not too valuable, a member of the Italian Foreign Office was telling Russian, French and German acquaintances of a most amazing thing he recently had seen with his own eyes from a small yacht upon which he was taking a day's sail in the English Channel off the Devonshire coast.

But when he described what he had seen the Wilhelmstrasse men ridiculed it. They told of their own emissary to the Trevor estate and how he got into it. Eventually, the Italian was convinced he must have been dreaming on the little sail-boat's deck.

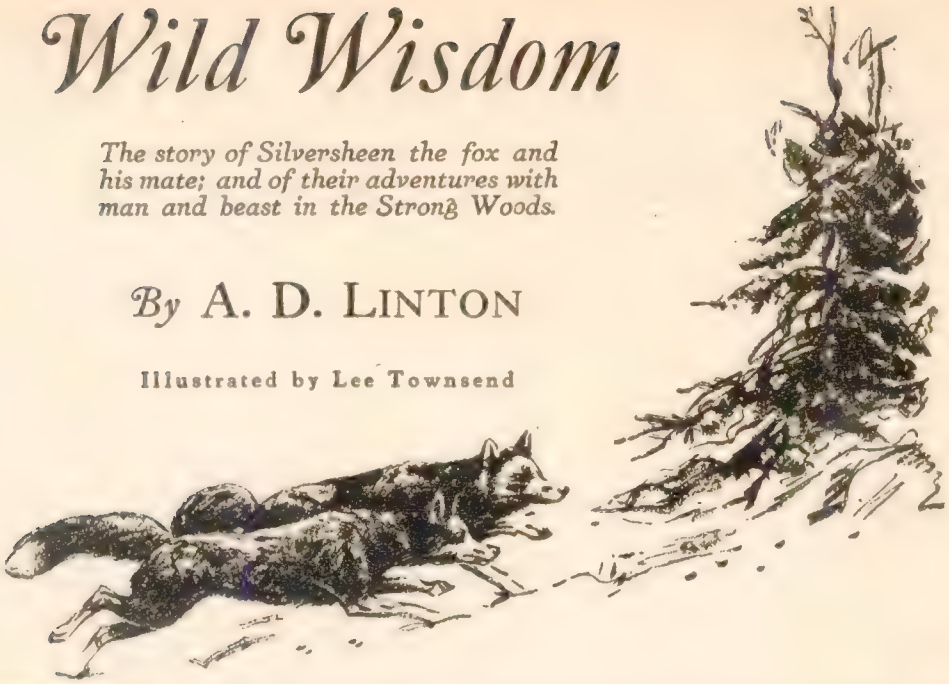
A month later, the official gazettes announced that the King had been pleased to create the former Earl Trevor, Marquess of Lyonesse—and his wife, Countess of Dyvnaint in her own right—presumably because of their very cordial relations with the Governments of other world powers.

Wild Wisdom

The story of Silversheen the fox and his mate; and of their adventures with man and beast in the Strong Woods.

By A. D. LINTON

Illustrated by Lee Townsend



THE great forest which stretched for miles in the land of the Strong Woods was wrapped in a cold, almost cloistered stillness. Occasionally, however, the stillness was broken by the sudden frosty snap of a tree or the cheery notes of a hardy chickadee. Below was snow, and above the clear blue of a March sky.

Beneath a beech tree stood a man, listening to the subtly illusive music the dry beech leaves made in the wind. Against the gray bole of the tree he was almost indistinguishable. But the large silver-gray fox whose fur glistened in the sunshine as if sprinkled with diamond dust had seen him. His sharp, dark nose was pointed forward; his magnificent brush stood stiffly out behind. He stood frozen like a thing carved from silver quartz.

For perhaps five seconds neither man nor animal moved. Then there was a flash like the reflection of sunlight on highly polished metal, and the next second that fox was gone. The man drew a deep breath.

"A silver fox!" He spoke aloud as men do who live alone. His voice was full of awed wonder. "And ye gods, what a fox!"

Grant Lamberton, before the war a law student with two years of study behind him, and after the war gassed lungs and probable T. B. before him if he didn't flee the city as from the wrath to come, chose the land of the Strong Woods and the life of the trapper. Now years of untainted air which blew through healing pine woods, had made of him a man as tough and strong as the woods in which he lived.

But as his lungs had grown tougher, his heart had become correspondingly softer. The business of trapping animals was beginning to stab his conscience. Figure it out and argue with himself as he might, he saw the steel trap as a cruel and cowardly warfare on forest life. He had to live, and it was in the wilderness he would live. But he had begun to see in fur-farming the alternative to the steel trap and its undeniable cruelty. And now, as he beheld this superb silver fox, the idea took firm root. To capture this silver fox alive, uninjured, and to get a mate for him—even a common red fox—there was the nucleus of his fox-farm! By careful breeding it was possible, Lamberton knew, to develop breeds of a standard color. And the island half a mile out from the mainland and due west from his cabin was just the spot for his fur-farm.

Thereafter for hours, days and even weeks, Lamberton dreamed and planned to catch the silver fox he had come to call Silversheen. At last his dreams and plans assumed definite shape, in the form of an innocent-looking bit of wood and glass.

THE silver fox, whom Lamberton had fancifully named Silversheen, placed a mile between himself and the man beneath the beech tree before he paused under a snow-canopied balsam. He had been a trifle indiscreet to have dared the day so openly. But because of the desire surging through his wild young heart, his caution had slipped its usual vigilance. For Silversheen was questing for his mate.

On the night before there had come, faint and far from up the shore, a voice which had set the blood racing through his veins. It was the vixen bark with that curious quality which the dog-fox is quick to recognize. He had answered her with a wild, spontaneous yell which would have done justice to an enraged wildcat. Though he knew that a vixen seldom answers, it filled the heart of the silver dog-fox with a jealous rage when he heard instead other voices which distinctly were not hers. He had quested near and far, up and down the shore, but he had not found her.

Now, as he sat under the snow-laden balsam, his red tongue licked his jaws as he pondered and considered. He knew quite a lot about the man he had just seen, having often investigated his cabin on the river shore. Silversheen knew all about his traps, too. For he had sprung many of them, had eaten and enjoyed the meals their baits provided. Not a bad sort, that man—as men went. At least he didn't put poison baits around as did that other man whose lines adjoined his. This other man was quite different—his traps, even, had a different smell. Silversheen never ate the baits on those traps nor the meat lying too generously around. He had seen many an animal stretched out near that scattered meat, with limbs hideously distorted as from violent convulsions.

AS Silversheen sat thinking things over, it came to him that perhaps since the night before the vixen who had called to him—only to him, of course!—had fallen a victim to either those traps or that poisoned meat. But no. He scratched an ear and his red tongue came out in an assured and complacent smile. She wasn't hunting for meat; she was looking for him. No doubt she was even then fast asleep in her lonely den, waiting for the night and for him.

And with that assured and comforting thought, he came out from under the balsam canopy, sniffed the air, stretched his steely muscles as an expression of zest in a life that was good to live, waved his brush insolently and minced away.

At the foot of a hawthorn tree he surprised a partridge which was feeding on frozen haws. A furious rush, a quick leap, a snap, and the bird was between his jaws. Another snap on the neck to insure demise, and Silversheen trotted to his den under the roots of a huge, overturned elm tree. There he ate the partridge, after which he slept.

HE slept till nightfall. A wood mouse stole out from among the roots of the elm, caught a glimpse of the silver fur, then scampered away in terror. A chickadee sang in a tree near by; a red squirrel ranted daringly from the safety of a tall pine.

When soft-footed night arrived and the stars hung golden, he emerged from his den. His sharp nose pointed to the plushy blue-black of the skies, he sniffed for information. Satisfied that nothing unusual was afoot, he sped through dim forest aisles, radiantly, splendidly alive, flashing silver-gray in gray shadows, flitting through moonlit patches of forest like a wisp of gray mist. But never for a moment did he relax his caution, a nocturnal necessity which weighs upon all wild animals. Sometimes he paused to send a questing cry through the dusk-green forest distances. Receiving no answer but that of a rival dog-fox, he would bark a challenge full of murderous hate; getting no reply to such a message, he would prance along insolently on feet as light as dandelion down.

So at last he came to the shore of the river along which he had heard that voice the preceding night. Half a mile out the island lay like a black blob in the light of the risen moon; between the island and the mainland lay a dark ribbon of current-fretted, unfrozen water.

Pointing his muzzle to the skies, he sent forth a cry of indescribable wildness and mystery, then sat back on his haunches and waited. That cry, he knew, should bring an answer. And it did. From far along the river's bank to the north it was answered. It was *her* voice!

For a minute thereafter he acted as if struck by lightning. He whirled around several times like wind-driven snow. Then

he went. He lay down to it madly, blindly, flying in the direction of that alluring cry. When finally he struck the vixen's trail, what had been speed before was now mere dallying. He became a streak of silver light, traveling as fast as light itself.

Half a mile farther and half a minute later he stopped as if suddenly transfixed, then stiffened. For on his right a slender silver-gray fox, her fur glinting like star-dust in the moonlight, had trotted out from behind a balsam tree and now stood looking at him, the immemorial female in her look and bearing.

For a moment Silversheen's universe went spinning about his head. When the spinning sensation ceased, his lonely, yearning, aimless past dropped behind him in the gray mists of forgetfulness. Before him was a glorious, promising, sun-lit present. An intoxication of wild exhilaration seized him. He spun dizzily around and around; he leaped into the air, then thudded down again on forelegs stretched straight out before him, head thrust forward, dog-like. He whined, he yelped, he barked, running the whole scale of vocal joyousness.

And after these amorous acrobatics and this vulpine vocality, the lady, evidently well pleased with the entertainment and demonstrations, leaped at him and playfully nipped his ear. He was accepted.

A few minutes later, whining and yipping into each other's faces, side by side they left the moonlit shore and trotted into the woods, smiling and serene. Silversheen's heart was full of a great content.

SPRING came; the Northland shook off its winter's torpor. The air was full of impalpable odors of new fern shoots, fresh leaf buds and sap-filled trees.

Silversheen and his mate, whom we may as well name Star Dust, hunted and slept together. Their den was Silversheen's, now widened to accommodate the two. The time was approaching when the burrow would need to be widened still further to accommodate the expected family. More and more Silversheen hunted by himself.

Their silvery coats were thinning, but with good living were still glossy. That condition was true of the fur of all the forest people, and it meant that the trapping season, legally speaking, was over and that the traps should therefore disappear.

To the two silver foxes, probably the only silver foxes in that forest, the story of their domain was a well-thumbed book, dog-eared by references of whose-and-what scent and what-and-when footprints.

But, although the two silver foxes had a right to make this deduction concerning the legal trapping season, they had not reckoned fully and accurately with Jacques Grondin, whose trap-lines adjoined those of Lamberton. They could not know that Jacques, having one day caught a glimpse of Silversheen, had placed on the big silver's pelt an exaggerated value and that, unlike Lamberton, he was out to get the big silver dead or alive, in season or out of it. But foxes, unlike humans, need only one experience to drive home a truth—or, for that matter, several truths.

THEY were skirting the river's shore one evening, hoping to get a nesting duck, a dead fish or perchance, even a fat muskrat They came to a reedy inlet, a backwash of the river, a likely place for such edibles.

As all trappers know, a fox does not like to wet his feet. So the two silvers noted with much satisfaction that, spanning an open pool of some yards' extent and lying between the shore and a little island of matted rushes and scrub willows, were most convenient, moss-covered stepping-stones.

To Silversheen, his wariness immediately on the alert, they looked almost too convenient. So, as his mate moved to step upon the first of those stones, he nudged her, in the silent language of wild things, a caution that things might not be as they seemed. They both retired to the shore then, noses, ears and eyes all working together in an efficient combination to search out danger.

And presently their noses found it—a whiff of fish. Carefully segregating the odor, they found it came from the second mossy stone. But neither fish nor trap was visible. It puzzled Silversheen. Come to think of it, too, that stone and the next one

had too heavy a thatch of moss to be just natural.

"Cunning as a fox" is a saying which has a solid foundation in fact. With an intimation to his mate to stay where she was, Silversheen stepped into the shallow water. Not for the fish was he undergoing that discomfort; he had to investigate.

Cautiously, therefore, he sniffed for human scent, but the water and the deliciously offensive odor of decomposed fish submerged all other scents. He peered sharply down into the water, then stared for a moment, and smiled in serene satisfaction. For just under the water lay a chain, and where chains were, there also were traps.

They were fairly hungry, yes; but better empty bellies than maimed legs if not actual death! The two ran up and down the shore and at last found what they had missed as they came down—the man scent, the heavy, putrescent, exciting odor of one man in particular.

That settled the territory of Jacques Grondin for them and they both made haste to leave it. Traveling up-wind, swift, supple, silent as specters, they flitted through the forest gloom, seeking their food in safer parts.

It was midnight, however, before they fed. A rabbit, fleeing from a pursuing wildcat, ran across their path. There was a shimmering flash which was Silversheen, a quick click which was his strong teeth; then the limp gray body was slung over his thick silver ruff and two foxes were speeding homeward for a midnight supper.

ABOVE their den as they ate an owl peered down and quivered with fear at the gruesome sounds coming from that festal board beneath the elm; a wood mouse squeaked in sudden hysteria and fled along a thread-like tunnel.

The two foxes were licking their chops after their meal when there came to them a distant, mellow cry. It filled them with perturbation and misgivings. They ceased licking their lips and their eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Instinctively they knew that sound for the voice of the dog, their cousin turned traitor to their kind in the far-back ages. The voice came from the direction of Jacques Grondin's cabin, a full three miles away.

As the silver dog-fox listened with the mole-like keenness of his sharp ears, it came to him that it was his to do, and if need be, to die for his mate and for their

unborn young. That dog must not be allowed to find the den under the elm.

Making her understand that she was to stay at home, Silversheen started off in the direction from which the hound's bay had come. He ran to meet it until he was sure that the dog was on their trail. Then, at the spot where he had killed the rabbit and where the scent would be the strongest, he ran a fresh trail in a course directly away from the den.

Silversheen traveled miles that night, doubling, looping, crossing, confusing, running up steep inclines to wind the dog, losing his scent in streams, leaping into half-fallen trees, walking their length, then leaping far out, using every device known and practiced by the most experienced foxes, and finally had the satisfaction of hearing an ever-receding and distinctly disheartened bay which ended at last in the complete silence of defeat.

When at last he was sure the chase was over, Silversheen's red tongue came out in a broad and amiable grin. Dogs lived too much with the men they served to be as clever as a fox!

After a final sniff at the air for current events, he trotted homeward.

NOT until the next night at dusk did the two silver foxes come out again.

With the demands made upon her by the unborn litter, Star Dust was now very hungry. But luck seemed to be against them that night. One squirrel helped a little, but to the hungry vixen it was more of a tantalizer than a filler.

Discouraged, Silversheen finally led a course direct to the river and through Lamberton's trap-lines where he hoped they

might find a nesting duck. In this man's territory at least would be found no "stepping-stone" traps. So secure did they feel that they passed within a few yards of Lamberton's unlighted cabin.

But no matter how cunning or wise one may be, sooner or later Fate will lay a stone in the path of circumstances upon which the cunning and wise one trips.

A few yards from the shore they came upon a rabbit trail. That is, since it smelled of rabbit, it must be a rabbit trail. To be sure, mixed up with the rabbit scent was human scent also. But then, being so near his cabin, the man walked there occasionally. No very profound reasoning was required for that solution.

The two foxes wheeled for that scent and sniffed carefully for signs of freshness. Neither very fresh nor very stale, probably a few hours old. Somewhat desultorily they followed it for a few yards—and presently froze at sight of something in front of them. That something looked very much like one of the boxes they had often seen outside the cabin a few rods away.

The box was open at both ends. No doubt about that, for they could see straight through it. Each end stood upright above the top of the box. Nothing so strange about that either. Boxes were of all kinds and shapes. Not so very long ago they had both almost swooned with delight over a box just outside Lamberton's cabin. The top of that box had stood open, supported by the half-drawn nails at one end. Dried herrings had been in that box—only that and nothing more! And, shades of shad, what a heavenly odor!

This box, now—they drew cautiously near to it. Great running rabbits! If there were not inside that box two dead rabbits! Dead, for they didn't move. One for each of them. Their meat!

STILL, Silversheen, less hungry than his mate and therefore more cautious, hung back. But inch by inch the hungry vixen was bellying toward the box. When he whined a caution, she snarled impatiently. What did a mere male know of hunger like hers! Deliberately, defiantly, she entered and grabbed a rabbit. The lid behind her fell down into place.

Silversheen gave a startled leap into the air, then ran to the other end to see why she didn't come out that way. He peered into the box and could see her quite plainly crouching over a rabbit. But she wasn't coming out. Very silly of her to eat the rabbit in there, but the actions of females at times were rather unaccountable anyway.

He barked a low, encouraging bark; she answered with a snarl of rage. Dear, dear, but she was in a bad temper! She often had been of late. He barked again, this time commandingly. Again she snarled. Well, there seemed to be nothing to do but to go in and make her come out.

Cautiously he stepped inside and slid toward her. The door at his end dropped with a bang and just cleared his brush. His nose touched a pane of glass which separated them. Trapped! Both of them!

Red-eyed and slavering, the two tore and bit at the glass which separated them, at the sides of the box. For a time the interior of that box was an animal madhouse. Exhausted, they finally lay still.

PRESENTLY a man came with a lantern. With trembling hands he slid back a panel on the top of the box below which was wire netting. He peered within. Then he straightened up; his eyes shone and his breath came quickly.

"Great wiggling pollywogs!" he almost yelled when he could find his voice, while the two silver foxes crouched and met the man's popping eyes with their own burning, unblinking ones.

"Oh, boy, oh, boy!" Lamberton gurgled; "a silver king and his queen! If this isn't luck, then somebody name it!"

He bent down again and stared at the two silvers with shining eyes.

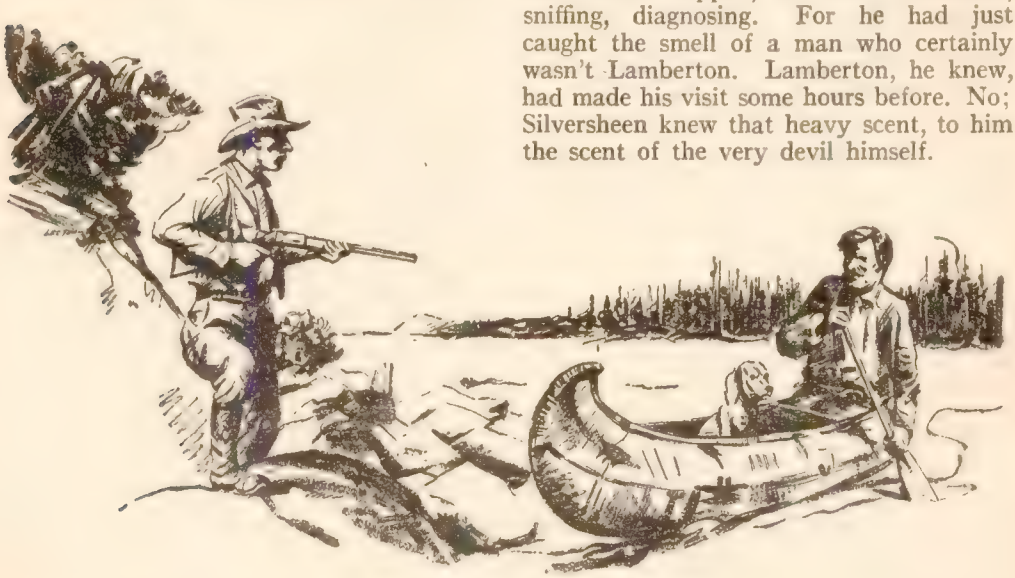
"Do you know what this means for me, you beauties? It means a queen for me too—a wife, do you hear? Now that you know what this means to me, you wont so much mind the rotten trick I've played on you, will you?"

The following day the two silver foxes found themselves set free on the island which was to be Lamberton's fox-farm. This island, lying about midway of a large river, was about thirty acres in area, and composed of rocks, huckleberry bushes, a few hardwoods and a lot of scrub pines.

To the two foxes it was freedom of a sort, but compared to that to which they had been accustomed, very restricted. Had Lamberton not fed them they would have starved, for of animals there were none on the island save a few squirrels and chipmunks. In a reedy lagoon facing the mainland flocks of ducks frequently alighted to feed, and these provided the only hunting

thrills the two foxes were to know for some months.

Among a pile of granite boulders at the far end of the island the two silvers found a perfect burrow with an entrance large enough for only a fox. In fact Silversheen himself could hardly squeeze through—which caused his mate no anxiety whatever.



"If ever I catch you on this island again, Grondin, I sha'n't wait for the law to settle with you! Now get!"

The time was very near at hand when she would not permit him to enter the den.

In this burrow a short time after their exile, were born a litter of four, two females and two males. Of these three were silver foxes who had chosen to run true to parental form and color. The fourth, a male, was a throw-back to the red and recent ancestry. But not for another two months did Lamberton discover what that burrow held for him in fur-farming futures.

It did not take the two long to connect Lamberton's daily visits with the supplies of food left for them at the far end of the island where he landed. The supplies were so generous that, had Fate not intervened, Silversheen and his mate would have been in danger of degenerating into fat, sluggish foxes who might eventually lose all initiative, skill and cunning.

In time the two foxes came to accept Lamberton as a harmless human, peaceably disposed toward them. But they were in no danger of deducing that all humans were necessarily the same. Age-old instincts and their own experiences were at variance with such deductions.

THUS it happened that one summer's day when the young family and their mother were playing in front of their den and Silversheen was skirting the shore at the other end of the island for dead fish, he suddenly stiffened and his nose came into the air with a jerk.

Nose twitching, fur along his spine raised and brush dropped, he stood motionless, sniffing, diagnosing. For he had just caught the smell of a man who certainly wasn't Lamberton. Lamberton, he knew, had made his visit some hours before. No; Silversheen knew that heavy scent, to him the scent of the very devil himself.

Presently the man rounded a thicket and walked toward him. It was Jacques Grondin all right, and he carried a gun under his arm. His eyes were peering here and there, searching, noting every detail.

Like a flash of tinsel paper, Silversheen dashed forth from the bole of the tree behind which he had been hidden and darted for better cover. As he reached the better screening of a clump of silver birches, a shot twanged a few feet to one side of him. From clump to clump, from boulder to boulder he raced, but always away from the den in the rocks. And always Jacques followed, getting an occasional and tantalizing glimpse of silver fur only as often as the owner of that fur chose he should.

Then, as he led his panting pursuer toward the shore facing the mainland, Silversheen saw a canoe land. Almost did he smile then, for he had a definite assurance that both his dilemma and Jacques would be settled. He crouched behind a rock to see what would happen.

AS Lamberton stepped ashore, Jacques stopped stock-still with surprise. Then, having apparently made up his mind to bluff it out, he awaited Lamberton's approach with well-simulated nonchalance.

"What are you doing here?" Lamberton asked, a frosty snap in his voice.

"Hontin' duck eggs," Jacques lied, and grinned.

"And that's a lie! You know as well as I do that ducks don't lay as late as this."

"An' you know dam' well dat a duck he lay de secon' tam in de season!" Jacques blustered.

"And so you fire your gun at duck eggs?" Lamberton withered.

Jacques shrugged and grinned. "No—I fire at a tree for fon."

Lamberton surveyed the lying breed disdainfully. "Now see here, Grondin," he said coldly, "you needn't trouble to make up any more of your lies. I know what you came here for, but what you don't know is that this island is mine."

"Zat so?" Jacques asked insolently.

"It is," Lamberton snapped. "And here is something more: If ever I catch you on this island again, Grondin, I sha'n't wait for the law to settle with you. I'll be the law! And I'll give you one hell of a leathering you'll never forget! Now get!"

Jacques got—he knew that Lamberton meant what he said. Lamberton followed close behind him and soon after the breed had got away, pushed his own canoe off. Then Silversheen trotted contentedly to his family which he knew would be safely hidden in their burrow.

But the coming of the breed had been a break in their secure and carefree routine, and a break in routine is always more or less annoying and disturbing to animals. It took the fox colony several weeks to forget it.

By that time the young foxes had been weaned and had learned about all their parents could teach them in the semi-domesticated life they lived. Finally, as a hint that her maternal obligations toward them were now ended, Star Dust left the burrow in the rocks to the four youngsters and began to occupy the den Silversheen had occupied since their coming to the island.

THE deciduous trees on the island were now a blaze of color; the nights had an exhilarating tang of frost. September was two-thirds over.

A day came of still air and glassy river save where the current, on each side of the island, swirled unceasingly, like a liquid, living thing. Nature was in one of her bland moods preceding a burst of equinoctial temper. But though below was brooding breathlessness, far above among the mauve-gray clouds was a movement which spoke of adjusting temperatures.

On his way to the Post down the river a few miles Lamberton had called and had left what was equal to a two days' rationing against weather emergencies.

Silversheen and Star Dust, as a mere matter of amusement, were stalking a duck in the little reedy lagoon. For some time they had felt the dead level of their island life pall upon them. They longed for their old haunts with their miles of unrestrained freedom, for the thrills of their former mode of life, for its dangers even, for the chance to hunt their living like self-respecting foxes. In short, they were bored to death with the deadly monotony of their life on the island.

Raising his head from behind a boulder to calculate his next move upon the duck, Silversheen saw something which caused him utterly to forget all about the duck or his boredom. A gray shadow was crawling across the river's still surface like a lizard.

When Silversheen whined softly to get his mate's attention, the duck rose into the air with a squawk. Nerves tense as gut strings, the two foxes watched the approaching canoe. They knew it wasn't Lamberton. Besides, as the canoe drew nearer, they saw that it held two occupants one of whom was in the bow. The one in the bow smelled distinctly dog—the dog which Silversheen had trailed and fooled the night before they left the mainland.

AS they watched the canoe land at the usual place, they had no desire to smile at the hound. They were too well aware that the island held all too few opportunities for employing the various fox tricks of escape. A man with a gun and a dog had all the advantages. For, being who and what he was, they were in no doubt as to the object of the breed's visit.

They were not worrying about the half-grown litter. They knew that at the first bay of the hound the young foxes would at once take refuge in the den whose entrance was too small for any hound to enter. But to give their young chance to make cover they stayed where they were, waited until

they saw the breed pull the bow of the canoe up on to the beach a careless foot or so, then set off to the west side of the island.

The dog was not long in picking up the fox scent, always a strong one and now accentuated a hundred-fold through carelessness and the limited area. At the hound's first fluted bay which could be heard for miles in the still air, flocks of ducks started up in flickering flight; the quiet island came suddenly to life.

Satisfied that by now their young would be in their den, the parent foxes sped in varying directions from before the pursuing hound. But fat and easy living had made them rotund-bellied, and lack of long-distance running had left their muscles soft and flaccid.

Across the length and breadth of the island they fled, gaining an occasional few seconds of advantage by leaping up rocks and fallen trees where a dog could not follow them, then leaping far out and down. But against a man who had a gun and a dog, their situation was rather similar to that of a mouse chased by a cat in a box. Twice, with the dog in full tongue behind them, they passed within a few feet of Jacques. Twice a shot pinged over their heads. Their situation was nothing short of desperate.

BY this time the wind had come. On the west side of the island the trees were thrashing to its steady rise; to the east the black-fringed firs of the mainland were bending away from its advance.

With Star Dust just behind him, the breed and his gun some hundred yards or so away, and the dog with his nose to the ground some fifty yards in the rear, Silversheen arrived at the sandy beach where lay the canoe.

Following his probable mental processes, we may assume that Silversheen saw in that canoe which lay so far out in the water, a chance of breaking the scent. Had a log been there instead of a canoe, he would probably have followed the same tactics he now pursued. It is not at all likely that, hard-pressed as they were, he had any intention of leaping into the water and swimming for it, for foxes do not swim save when most unusual circumstances force them to discover the fact that they *can* swim. It was simply that they faced a vital strategic problem which Silversheen prepared to solve with fox strategy, though we may safely infer he had not the slightest thought that things would work out as they did.

Silversheen leaped straight into the canoe and landed in the stern. Right after him, with never a doubt in her mind as to her mate's wisdom, came Star Dust also. With a good hundredweight of fox in the stern of that canoe, its bow shot up from the foot of sand on which it lightly rested. Then, as Silversheen gingerly maneuvered to get amidships of the wabbly craft for his leap ashore, the wind took the matter out of his management. It swung the canoe off and out. Before the two foxes could properly make their leap ashore, they found themselves being rapidly borne away toward the mainland. Not that they knew where they were headed for; they crouched in the bottom of the canoe and waited for they knew not what.

WHEN the hound, nose down, eyes unseeing and baying loudly and triumphantly, in due time reached the shore and incidentally the end of the fresh scent he had been following, the canoe and its passengers were already some yards out. In overdue time came also Jacques to where his hound was tearing madly up and down searching for the lost scent. But all Jacques saw was his canoe adrift. With that sight came the blasting realization that he was stranded on that island to await the "one hell of a leathering" he knew Lamberton would surely give him.

It was just as well, perhaps, that the two foxes were not near enough to hear the breed's fervent and fearful cursing, for it was hot enough to singe their fur. Anyway they had their own fears. Desperately they gripped the floor of the canoe with their claws as the light craft dizzily climbed the foam-capped waves or slid sickeningly into green, watery hollows sideways to the wind. Had they looked over its dipping gunwales they might have seen Lamberton paddling desperately for the island on his way from the Post, his face white with anger and the determination to give Jacques Grondin even more than he had promised him.

At last a huge wave landed the canoe high and dry on the beach of the mainland. Cautiously then the two foxes peered over its gunwales and seeing land, leaped lightly and joyously out. Without even a backward glance, they raced for the bank—and a moment later the dark forest received them.

The tracks told him the bus had landed safely, but other tracks were even more interesting.

Wherein a cool-headed pilot rescues a kidnaped girl in 1930 fashion.

S. O. S.

By H. K. CASSELS

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

THE Blakeneys were giving a dance for Janet Gausden in honor of her engagement to Bob Telford; and Johnny Lawrence, though he didn't usually waste the hours of sleep on such functions, felt that on this occasion, because he was an old friend of Mr. Gausden and had taught Janet to fly, he ought at least to put in an appearance.

He left the Mercury Flying Club in his own machine, *Kingbird,* and at about seven o'clock arrived at a landing-station only two miles from the Blakeney home. Paddy, his faithful mechanic, was with him, and Johnny left the machine in his charge with orders to be ready for an early start.

"If they let me go to bed at a reasonable hour, I'll be here by about eight o'clock," he said. "If I have to stay up late, I wont go to bed at all, so I'll want to start as soon as it's light. Mind you have her ready."

"Sorr!" Paddy's voice was reproachful. "Was it ever I didn't have *Kingbird* ready for you? I'll bed right in the hangar, and if you come at midnight, she'll only need to be pushed out and have the prop swung."

Paddy was a mechanic beyond price, both skillful and thorough.

A car was waiting to take Johnny to the house. As it drew up before the entrance, and before he had time to alight, Bob Telford ran out to meet him and called anxiously:

"Thank God, you're here!" It was not unusual for people in trouble to feel relieved when Johnny appeared. "It's Janet. Did you see anything of her? She should have arrived at six, and now it's seven-thirty."

BOB was already in evening dress, but his disheveled hair and excited manner looked strangely out of place on the broad terrace fronting the big house. Johnny opened the door of the car, reached out and drew him inside, and ordered the driver to

move on. He realized that something serious was the matter.

"Let's keep this quiet," he suggested. "No good exciting the crowd. Now tell me. Was she flying here?"

Bob nodded. "From Bunting. She left there before five and should have made it in an hour. And she hasn't phoned. If it was a forced landing and she got down all right, she'd have done that right away, so that we could send for her."

Johnny glanced at his watch. "She must have been down for at least an hour and a half. You've phoned everywhere, I suppose—the police and the club?"

"Everywhere. Every farm on the way. A speed-cop noticed her twenty miles out from Bunting, and that's the last word of her."

Johnny's blue eyes contracted as an idea suddenly occurred to him.

"You had no reason to expect anything like this?" he asked. "I mean, is there any other explanation you can think of besides a forced landing?"

Bob seemed surprised. "Expect anything! What do you mean? Janet's a good pilot, as *you* should know, and the weather's been all right."

This was enough to tell Johnny that Janet's father hadn't taken Bob into his confidence on a certain matter, so in order to distract attention from his question, he began to talk about something else.

"Look here, son. If it was light enough, I'd go right up and look for her, but it would do no good in the dark. You can send out some cars to scout around. The country's so empty that she might be on a road, trying to get a lift. Meanwhile pull yourself together and don't spoil the party. That's what Janet would want. Say she was delayed, and may be here later. It may turn out to be true. And if she doesn't come, I'll go up first thing in the morning and have a thorough look."

Bob agreed to do this and tried hard not to look worried as they drove back to the house.

THROUGHOUT the evening Johnny Lawrence did his best to remain in the background, but it was impossible for him to avoid attention altogether. He was tall, and his brown, scarred face stood out above the heads of the other guests with an air of distinction and achievement. Besides, there was no one interested in flying who hadn't heard of his war record; and now rumors were creeping round about the long flight he was planning to make in the *Kingbird*. It was to be a sensational, record-breaking flight, but no one knew when or where he was going; and because he refused to be drawn out, people were all the more eager to question him.

He was thankful that he had not many friends among the girls there, and he was soon through the dances that he felt were owing. With the men who wanted to talk to him he was as brief as possible, so that by supper-time he felt that his duty was done, and in the confusion of finding partners and tables, he slipped unnoticed up to his room. He undressed quickly, and in spite of the music and voices from below he enjoyed five hours of sound sleep.

By six o'clock next morning he was dressed in his working-clothes; and going downstairs, he found a servant engaged in clearing away the refreshments. From her he got a cup of coffee and some sandwiches. Then he borrowed a car and drove to the landing-ground. By the time Paddy was dressed and *Kingbird's* engine warmed up, it was light enough to make a start.

JOHNNY was not surprised that the cars sent out had been unable to find Janet's plane. The country on the way to Bunting was empty except for a few scattered farms, and the only motor road curved considerably away from the direct line which she would probably have taken. But flying at two thousand feet, he had gone less than half the distance when he saw the ship, apparently uninjured, resting on level ground in a little valley.

He throttled back, side-slipped down and landed close beside it, noticing while he descended that there were no buildings within three or four miles. As he walked toward the deserted machine, he could see no signs of any damage. But something else caught his eye, and so he told Paddy to look over the engine and find out what was wrong with it, and he himself began to cast round, looking at the tracks on the soft earth.

These told him clearly that the bus had been landed safely. The mark of the tail-skid commenced almost level with those of the wheels, showing that it had been all but a three-point landing, and the machine had only run about eighty yards before it came to rest. But other tracks were even more interesting: the wheel-marks of a large car which had driven up close to where the

plane was standing. From there the prints of three pairs of shoes led to the machine and back again, and the tracks of two of these pairs, where they returned, were close together and deeper than when going out.

"Carrying something heavy," Johnny muttered.

At this moment Paddy called out:

"The dirty sneak! That was done on purpose. Look, sorr—she's seized up tight. There's not a drop of oil in her. It's no leak. The bung has been screwed out of the sump. Some bloodthirsty son of Satan must have done that right as she was starting, or 'twould have been noticed."

Johnny grunted. "So they had some one in their pay at Bunting! We'll find out about that afterward. Just now other things are more important."

He stepped up and looked into the cockpit. Everything was in order. He saw no sign of what he had hoped to find—some message or sign from Janet—till his eye was caught by scratches on the dashboard which had no business there: – – – . . . – – – He recognized it at once for the Morse code S. O. S., the tragic call for help which has been the only announcement of so many disasters.

For a moment he considered following the tracks of the car. That would be easy enough until they reached the highway, but he knew it was a hard pavement and realized that the car had twelve hours' start. So he climbed into *Kingbird* and lost no time in taking off and making for the headquarters of the Mercury Flying Club.

This club was an organization of amateur flyers and existed for the purpose of giving them service of all kinds, landing facilities, expert testing and repairs, meteorological reports and the best of advice on all aërodynamic problems.

Mr. Gausden, Janet's father, though not himself a pilot, had been one of the founders of the club, and had given freely of his wealth to make it as efficient as possible. He spent much of his time at the clubhouse, and Johnny felt sure that he would be waiting there for news of his daughter.

ON his way Johnny thought over the problem of Janet's disappearance. It had not surprised him altogether, for Gausden had told him of warnings he had received, a species of blackmail, from a gang of promoters who were exploiting a new oilfield. Gausden had got hold of a strip of land that was exceedingly important to these sharks because it shut them off from the railway. They had used the most unscrupulous means to prevent him from getting possession of it, and when foiled in that, to force him to part with it.

Just because of their violent methods Gausden had felt justified in holding the land until they paid a very stiff price for it. Finding nothing would move him, the promoters had resorted to threats, and Johnny guessed that it was the same gang who had engineered the kidnaping of Janet in the hope of frightening her father into giving up the land at their price.

WHEN Johnny landed, he found Gausden out on the tarmac to meet him, and as soon as he saw him, he felt sure that his guess had been correct. A business man of sixty whose health was none too good, Gausden looked as if he had had little sleep the night before, and his puffy eyes and face drained of all color suggested that any further strain might do him serious harm.

Without speaking, Johnny took his arm and led him away to his own quarters. He asked for a drink, and Johnny gave it to him and waited till he had swallowed a little of the neat spirit before starting to talk. Then he said:

"I see you know more than I do. I found her ship. It had been tampered with so that she was forced to land. She got down all right, but some men who had been expecting her thereabouts drove up in a car and took her away. Kidnaped, eh?"

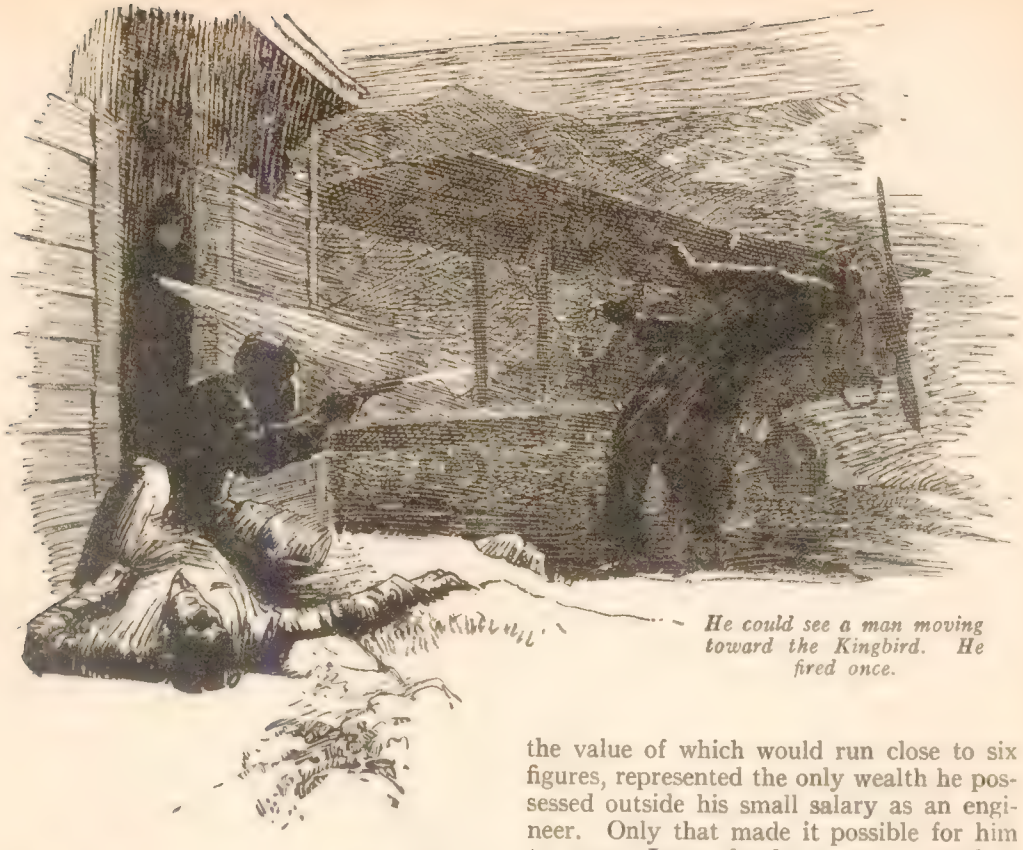
Gausden had been fumbling in his pocket, and now held out a letter.

"This will tell you all I know," he said wearily. "You can see that it was posted in Bunting last night, but there's no other clue on it."

"They had a confederate there," Johnny remarked. "I suppose they went that way to pick him up."

He took the letter and unfolded a plain sheet of paper on which was typewritten the following:

> Obey these instructions and your daughter will be returned to you unharmed:
>
> Have a title deed to that land made out with all legal requirements, the name of the consignee to be John Small of Chicago. This is to be wrapped up suitably and conveyed in an airplane as follows: The plane must be over Cotton railroad-junction at eleven P. M. one night this week, and from there will fly due west at a thousand feet until the pilot sees below him a red light flashing at regular intervals. He will then fly due south until a green light is seen flashing in the same way.



He could see a man moving toward the Kingbird. He fired once.

The packet containing the deed must be dropped over this second light. Any attempt to discover the receiver or any further action in the matter will endanger your daughter's life. You know we mean business.

Johnny studied the letter till he was sure he could remember the instructions. Then he handed it back to Gausden.

"What about it?" he asked. "Are you going to tell the police or give in to them?"

Gausden flung out his hands in a helpless gesture.

"What can the police do? I know these men. They're quite unscrupulous. And they've managed so that I can't fasten anything onto them. No. I've already sent for my lawyer to have him make out the deed."

Johnny nodded. "I guess you're right. It's for you to decide. I'm glad it isn't my job."

He knew that it would do no good to disagree with Gausden, but his opinion on the matter was actually somewhat different. It happened that Bob Telford owned a share of this land in question, and as Janet's fiancé he could only agree with her father's decision. To Gausden the loss would not be of much consequence, but Bob's share, the value of which would run close to six figures, represented the only wealth he possessed outside his small salary as an engineer. Only that made it possible for him to marry Janet, for he was too proud to accept money from his father-in-law. So Johnny decided that under these circumstances it was up to him to make at least one effort to rescue Janet without giving up the land.

Gausden seemed to be relieved that Johnny appeared to agree with him.

"I can't set Janet's safety against any sum of money," he explained. "Perhaps after she's back, I'll be able to do something through the law. At least I can try."

"No good," Johnny said. "They're too smart. I bet they'll go through the form of buying that title from John Small for some price that looks reasonable. Then he'll be the only person you can get after; and if he exists at all, which I doubt, you may be sure he wont wait around for the trouble to start."

JOHNNY walked across the room and looked out over the 'drome; and when he spoke again, it was without turning round.

"I hope you'll let me take the thing. If you have it ready, I'll go tonight."

Gausden sprang from his chair and went to his side.

"Thank you, Johnny. I didn't like to ask you, but I'll be really relieved if you

will. Then I'll know there wont be any hitch."

"That's all right," Johnny answered. But he took the hand held out to him with a good deal of embarrassment, knowing that he was not being honest with Gausden, yet seeing no way of avoiding the deception.

AT eleven that same evening Johnny was over Cotton Junction in the *Kingbird*. Paddy was in the passenger's seat; and beside him, tucked under his seat cushion, was a little package sewn up in water-proof canvas.

He followed exactly the instructions given in the letter, and in due course the green light was flashing under him.

While flying by compass through the moonless sky he had been doing his best to figure out by dead reckoning his position on the map. As nearly as he could tell, his destination was in the middle of a pocket of country which was entirely deserted. He had flown over it once before and knew that it was dry, hilly country with the valley bottoms scattered with rocks. It would be very unlikely that he could find a good landing-ground, but though this made his chances far slimmer, it did not make him any the less determined.

Before he dropped the packet over the green light, he circled over the spot several times, and at last he saw what, with very little hope, he had been looking for. It was another light, flashing a few hundred yards from the first, a plain white light which appeared as if slanting from a window. And there was no mistaking the message it was sending: – – – . . . – – –

Johnny circled back over the green light, and there deliberately dropped his package overboard. The streamers he had fastened to it would help the searchers to find where it fell. Then he returned to the spot where he had seen the other light, and over it he released a landing flare with which he was equipped. As soon as it lit, he saw below him a small hut, probably a herder's deserted shack; and to his great relief, it was situated on a narrow strip of level ground where a landing would be just possible.

The flare brought other knowledge which was not so welcome. He had known that it would reveal him to his enemies and warn them that he was considering landing, but he had not anticipated how well they would be armed. For the flare was hardly well alight before a machine-gun opened fire.

Above the roar of his engine he could hear the coughing *ac-ac-ac-ac,* a sound that had made his heart jump ever since his first patrol over the lines, when his flight had been caught unawares by a formation of Fokkers diving out of a cloud, and the bus in front of him had gone down in flames. He could also hear the soft *phut* of bullets cutting through his wings, and the flutter of torn linen caught his eye. Good shooting under the conditions! And then a sudden scorching pain in his left arm told him that he had been hit himself.

The machine-gun was a surprise, but it did not change his plan. He had gone too far to turn back now. His arm felt all right, and the only effect of the shooting was to brace his judgment to quicker action. He estimated that the level ground by the hut was sheltered from the machine-gun by a slight rise in the ground, and before a dozen shots had been fired he had flung his machine into a steep bank, using top rudder to keep her nose up. He side-slipped vertically till within a few feet of the ground, then flattened out, banked again into a turn and came back to the hut with one wing almost trailing the ground.

Fortunately there was little wind; so he ignored it and as soon as he neared the hut, leveled his wings, stalled and pancaked, taking a chance on his undercarriage. It stood the strain, and he came to rest within a few yards of the hut.

LEAVING his prop ticking over, Johnny sprang from his machine. The flare still sent up a column of light, but the door of the hut was in darkness. He crept toward it, a gun ready in his hand. Knowing that Paddy also had a gun, he supposed that the mechanic would follow without waiting for instructions.

At the door Johnny paused. No light came through the crack, but he heard a whisper and the movement of feet. He put his hand out cautiously to test if the door was locked. It gave before his touch; so with a quick movement he flung it wide open, and at the same time threw himself flat on the ground. Two shots rang out from the darkness inside, and the bullets whistled over him. There was a moment of silence; and then, unable to see him, two men came rushing through the doorway.

As they reached him, Johnny raised his back sharply. They both tripped and sprawled over him in a tangle of arms and legs. There followed a number of shots. Johnny himself fired twice and then lay

still. He soon discovered that at least one of his shots had taken effect, for a body remained lying across him, so limp that he knew that there could be no life in it.

He cautiously wriggled to one side till he was free of this burden. Then he lay still again and listened breathlessly. There were noises he could not understand coming from the direction of the green light. But a nearer sound caught his attention, and looking intently, he could just see the silhouette of a man moving toward the *Kingbird*. He took careful aim and fired once. There came in answer the choking gasp of a man hit in the chest and the soft thud of a body collapsing.

Suddenly a flashlight was shining on him, the light coming from the door of the hut. It played on him for a moment only and then swung to the figure huddled beside the *Kingbird*. Johnny had turned with his gun ready, but the voice that came made him quickly drop his arm.

"Johnny, it's me, Janet. There aren't any more men. Tell me, are you hurt?"

UNTIL that moment he had forgotten the pain in his arm, but now he remembered and knew that his wound was no slight one. The struggle on the ground had caused it to bleed severely, and the pain and the loss of blood began to make him faint.

"I'm hit in the arm," he said. "Nothing much, but we'd better get out of this. Talk afterward." He was afraid she might lose her nerve, and was relieved when he made out her slim figure standing steadily beside him.

They walked toward the *Kingbird*, but as they went Johnny stumbled and found that his legs would not hold him up without the assistance of Janet's arm.

"You get in behind," she ordered. "I'll have to fly her back."

He began to do as he was told, but was dazedly conscious that he had forgotten something. As he fell weakly into the rear cockpit, he suddenly remembered what it was.

"Wait! I got to find Paddy!" he exclaimed. "I'm afraid he went to tackle the machine-gun crew."

He tried to climb out of the cockpit again, but Janet leaned over and forced him down.

"Now, Johnny, don't be foolish," she said. "The way you are now, you couldn't do anything to help him. If he's still alive, he'll probably get away all right, and we can send and pick him up tomorrow. And if they've got him, there's no sense in letting them get you too."

An overwhelming faintness came over Johnny. He tried to fight against it, tried to force himself to stand up, but found there was no strength in his legs. Faintly, as if from a long way off, he heard the roar of the engine as Janet gave her the gun. In a dim way he realized that they had taken off and were in the air. Then all consciousness left him.

WHEN Johnny next opened his eyes, he found that he was back in his own room at the flying club. It was no new experience to him, this returning to consciousness after a crash or other accident, and he closed his eyes again and carefully tested the various parts of his body to see what damage had been done. He found that he was weak but that only his left arm seemed to be injured, and that was bandaged and held rigid by a splint.

When he next opened his eyes, he found that his door was ajar and that Janet was peeping in. When she saw that he was awake, she entered with Bob Telford at her side. Johnny noted joyfully that she showed no traces of her experience. Her brown skin looked as clear and healthy as ever, and her gray fearless eyes held no shadow.

"Now lie still, you big crazy boob," she said affectionately, seeing that he was struggling to sit up. "You've lost a lot of blood, but if you keep quiet you'll be all right." And she leaned over and kissed him.

Johnny smiled ruefully. "I certainly am a boob, needing a girl to fly me out of a mix-up. Say, you must have made a corking good take-off to get up from that rotten little patch of ground. And didn't the machine-gun open up? The last thing I remember was waiting for it to start."

"The take-off was a close shave, all right. No, they didn't fire. That must have been Paddy's work."

"Have you any news of him?" Johnny interrupted anxiously.

Janet shook her head. "They've been out all day, but there's not a sign been found yet. At least his body's not there. But tell me, Johnny, why did you want to get yourself shot up for nothing? You'd thrown out the package they wanted. Didn't you think they'd send me back safely?"

Johnny smiled queerly. "I did not. In fact, I'm not sure they wont try to get you again. Don't go around alone for a while."

"Whatever for?" Janet cried.

Bob also joined in the exclamation. "We're tremendously grateful to you, old man; but they've won the round. The fellows you shot were only tools, and they've got the land. What else can they want?"

Their questions were not answered, for at that moment a nurse put her head into the room and spoke to Johnny.

"I hope your visitors aren't disturbing you too much, Mr. Lawrence. Do you feel strong enough to see some one else? A man calling himself Paddy Dolan seems very anxious to speak to you."

"Thank God!" Johnny breathed. "Send him straight in. There's nothing in the world that will do me more good than a sight of his ugly face."

WHEN Paddy appeared, there was no question as to the ugliness of his face, or at least of that part of it which could be seen, for most of it had been crudely bandaged. The one visible eye was green in color and half closed, and the side of his jaw was swollen enormously. But he seemed cheerful enough, and rushed to shake hands with Johnny.

"Mr. Johnny, sorr!" he cried. "It's praising God I am to see you alive."

"And the same to you, old scout!" Johnny replied heartily. "It was Miss Janet saved me. Whatever happened to you?"

"By heck, Mr. Johnny, wasn't she a beauty! Wasn't she a prize, sorr! She was the sweetest fight I've been in outside of Ireland. I wouldn't have missed that fight to be the Prince of Wales."

"But what happened to you?" Johnny repeated. "I thought you'd follow me to the hut."

"Follow you to the hut!" There was utter scorn in Paddy's voice. "Do you think I wasn't knowing you could handle whatever might be inside? But I knew what was in that package you threw out, so I went after that. I was halfway down when I met two boys bringing along the machine-gun. I had that revolver thing you gave me, but I can never hit a house with them, so I used it to crack his pate for one of the boys. The other swung the machine-gun against my face till I took it from him, and then we started to fighting with everything we could reach, whether it was rocks or boots or only fists. In the end I broke his head on a stone; but then, begorra, the first one was alive again, and I had to kill him once more. They were a good pair of boys." He sighed with feeling at the memory.

"And then?" Johnny asked. "How did you get back?"

"I tramped. I got a lift for a while, but when we come to a town, the police wanted to jug me because I was bleeding a little. I got away from them too though, and—here you are, sorr!"

AT the words he put his hand under his coat, and with a grand gesture he drew out a package neatly sewn up in waterproof canvas and laid it on Johnny's bed.

"There you are, sorr. She's the same you threw out."

Johnny coughed noisily, and when he spoke, his voice sounded curiously shaky. "You're right, Paddy—it is! You're wonderful, Paddy. It's too good to be true, getting that back!"

Janet and Bob added their thanks, which Paddy accepted with obvious delight. Then Johnny continued:

"Go round to the doctor now, Paddy, and get fixed up. Come and see me again later."

"Thank you; I'll do that," Paddy replied. "Then I'll get to work on *Kingbird*. She's in terrible shape. The monkeys haven't even wiped the grease off her." And he went out shaking his head over their laziness.

As soon as the door closed behind him it became apparent that Johnny was shaking with laughter.

"The same package! Good old Paddy! It's too good to keep a secret. Swear never to tell, and I'll let you in on the joke; but if Paddy ever finds out, it will break his heart."

The others nodded, and Johnny went on: "Go to that drawer, Bob, and see what you find."

Bob went to the drawer indicated, and opening it, he found a package exactly similar to the one Paddy had produced.

"That's for you," said Johnny. "That's the title to the land. Did you really think I'd let them have it without some sort of a fight? Now open the other one—the one Paddy brought."

Janet quickly cut the stitches and drew out of it, neatly folded, the comic supplement of the last Sunday paper.

"D'ye call that fit for decent pirates to eat, Cap'n? Would ye eat it yerself?"

A random leap back across the centuries—and a modern Londoner finds himself living through a former incarnation as a pirate captain. A pirate's life has its little vexations, too.

The Pirate's Choice

By BERTRAM ATKEY

Illustrated by Everett Lowry

IT so happened that, while traveling in India, Mr. Herbert Honey observed a dog rushing across a road in Benares, evincing symptoms of desiring to bite some one abundantly. The dog did so desire. But it was not Mr. Honey whom the animal desired, at the moment, to mangle. It was a rather frowsy old gentleman walking just in front, upon whom the dog rushed to bestow his attentions. Mr. Honey, however, thought that the creature was aiming at him, and with rare presence of mind, promptly flung his fully loaded half-plate camera at the dog. Immensely to the surprise of both Mr. Honey and the target, the camera landed fairly upon the dog's skull, flooring it abruptly, and so completely and instantaneously dissolving its ferocity that within a second and a half it had vanished round a corner, complaining bitterly of the English.

The old gentleman in front—who proved to be one of the most distinguished and competent lamas ever exported from Tibet—was almost embarrassingly grateful to Mr. Honey, and bestowed upon him a remarkable gift—namely, a bottle, itself a rare and most valuable example of Chinese glassware, containing certain pellets possessing the singular power of temporarily reinstating the swallower of any one of them in one of his previous existences.

Mr. Honey—unmarried, middle-aged—had taken some months to screw himself up to the point of an experiment. Nothing but an insatiable curiosity and a very good opinion of himself would have driven him to it. If he could swallow a pill and be certain of finding himself back in the days when he was, possibly, King Solomon, Julius Cæsar, Richard the First, or some such notable man, that would be quite satisfactory. But there seemed to be a certain risk that he might select a pill which would land him back on some prehistoric prairie in the form of a two-toed jackass, or on the keel of an ancient galley in the form of a barnacle, or something wet and uncomfortable of that kind.

It was undoubtedly a risk. He wished the lama had been a little less sketchy and haphazard about things; at least, he might have dated and labeled the pills. It would have been quite simple—"King; B. C. 992," for instance; or "Centurion; Early Roman." Or, if clammy incarnations had

to be introduced: "Eel; 1181 A. D." or "Squid; Stone Age." Then he would know which pills to take himself, and which to set aside for editors and publishers.

However, there it was. He could take them or leave them. He might become King of Egypt for a week-end, or he might become a jellyfish for a brief period.

He took out a pill and looked at it. Was that little, ordinary-looking thing a free pass to the palaces of Cleopatra in the form of Antony, or was it the "open sesame" to a brief existence as a weevil in a ship's-biscuit on board the old *Victory?* Who knew?

But at length Mr. Honey made the experiment — and found himself the court chiropodist to Queen Semiramis! He had a hard time in Babylon, and rejoiced when it was over; but curiosity drove him to a second attempt—and to a really frightful experience as a cave-man.

LET it not be believed, however, that Mr. Hobart Honey was discouraged by the lamentable failures of his excursions to Babylon or to the Stone Age. Although a mild-mannered man, he was not one who was easily discouraged; it was true that, so far, the lama's pills had merely presented him, in two distinct existences, as a person of extremely low and painfully avaricious character. But luckily he possessed a generous supply of the pills, and he was quite convinced that it was merely a question of choosing the right pill to discover himself in an existence of which he could be proud, and upon which he could give a series of those self-adulatory séances popularly known as lectures.

"All in good time," he mused, as he settled comfortably down in his study on the evening following his abrupt decease under the flint hatchet of Pru the Pretty. "All in good time. We shall see what we shall see."

He trickled out a pill,—a large one,—took up a glass of sherry, and without hesitation swallowed both.

He leaned back, waiting, with closed eyes.

HE had not long to wait. Almost instantly he became aware of the fact that he was on the sea, and as a glance showed him, on a warm, placid, deeply blue tropical sea, lazily swinging itself against a mainland that was exquisitely beautiful and dazzlingly sunlit.

Mr. Honey discovered himself to be standing upon the deck of a sailing ship,—an oddly old-fashioned ship, — leaning against the side. Glancing up at the peak of the mainmast, he perceived also that the flag was black, with a white skull and crossbones upon it. He did not feel startled at this plain indication of the nature of the craft upon which he discovered himself. It seemed quite natural, and the more so as it was swiftly dawning upon him that he not merely belonged to the pirate ship, but that he was captain of her.

"And by thunder," he swore,—though that was not the word he used,—"a trim little craft she is!"

London, his Baker Street flat, his literary work, his principles, and indeed the whole of his Twentieth Century habits, customs and instincts were now no more than a hazy dream to him—very hazy, even more hazy than usual. He found himself wondering why this was so; then he sharply remembered. They had broached a fresh cask of white rum on the previous evening, and dealt with it as pirates naturally would. No wonder he felt hazy. He put a gnarled and hairy paw to his forehead, and turning to a gigantic and bloodthirsty-looking negro who, stripped to the waist, was doing something to a brass cannon close by, he ordered him—with a flow of language that would have given the Mr. Honey of the Twentieth Century a sore throat to utter, or an earache to listen to—to fetch a pannikin of rum.

"And quick, d'ye see, ye black whelp, or I'll feed ye to the sharks!"

The black whelp did not dally. Few men could have fetched the rum quicker.

MR. HONEY—or, as he now knew himself to be, Captain Honey—proceeded to absorb his breakfast, staring the while with evil, bloodshot eyes at the little town off which his ship was anchored.

He was in a villainous temper, an unspeakable temper. For business was bad, extraordinarily bad, and had been so for the past six months. He had scoured the seas for thousands of miles, but the scouring had produced little in the way of victims, and practically nothing in the shape of plunder. Their supplies were running low; they had broached and half-finished the last cask of rum. The crew were murmuring libels to the effect that Captain Honey was one of the poorest pirates they had ever served under and was not up to his job; and already his bo'sun, his second mate

and three of the crew, all extremely competent cut-throats, had accepted an offer secretly conveyed to them by a rival pirate named Davis, and had deserted Captain Honey, swimming ashore to hide and await the arrival of Mr. Davis, who expected shortly to drop anchor there.

The Captain did not condescend to argue; he simply felled the cook with his pistol-butt.

And so Captain Honey, glaring across the sunny bay to the little town, was forced to confess to himself that things were bad, and unless he did something to improve them, and did it quick, he would either have to go out of the piracy business voluntarily, or be kicked out by his crew. He was full of rancor against this Davis; also he was full of rum.

"By my bones," he growled, "I have a mind to lie here, await the speckled dog, board him, string him up and take aboard the plunder he got at the sack of Leon and Realejo! Aye, and I'd do it, too, if it did not look so bad and set such a bad example for one pirate to rob another!"

He finished his pannikin, and laughed bitterly as he realized that he might as well hope to board the moon as any vessel of the capable Davis. He would have done it without hesitation if he could, but he was not half a match for the ruffian who was returning from his sacking of those Nicaraguan towns Leon and Realejo, and he knew it. He knew, also, that long before the enterprising Mr. Davis reached the harbor, he, Captain Honey, would have left it as fast as his vessel could take him.

After a few moments' thought, he calmed down a little, and decided to go ashore to see if he could not make arrangements to purchase a store of provisions. He laughed sourly at that.

"Ha! A pirate 'purchasing' goods!" he snarled. "Those dogs in the fo'c'stle must be about right—I'm not up to the job. But the town's too well armed to sack—"

He turned abruptly as the pirate cook came up, holding in his hands a large slab of something that once had been meat.

"Well, what d'ye want?" growled Captain Honey.

"Beg pard'n, Captain, but it's the crew's dinner. It's the last of the barrel. They sent me to show it to ye. They say they can't eat it. They bid me say that it's more likely to eat them!"

Captain Honey drew a pistol from his belt.

"Then let the mutinous hounds starve!" said he. "What's wrong with the beef? It's a fine bit of beef!"

The cook thrust it under the pirate's nose, and Captain Honey staggered back as though he had received a blow.

"D'ye call that fit for decent pirates to eat, Cap'n?" asked the cook, a burly, tough-looking old salt, impudently. "Would ye eat it yerself?"

The Captain did not condescend to argue. He simply felled the cook to the deck with his pistol-butt.

"If they can't eat it," he said coldly, as the cook feebly rose, "make soup of it, and let 'em drink it!"

"Aye-aye, sir," said the cook meekly, and tottered away to his galley, having firmly made up his mind to poison the Captain as soon as he could borrow the price of sufficient poison.

BUT Captain Honey knew that the incident was not a light matter. He called his mate,—a grim, gorillalike person in a red shirt, with a red bandanna handkerchief knotted over his head,—who was the only man on board upon whom the Captain felt he could rely, and warned him to keep the men in hand while he went ashore.

"And mark 'ee, Black Dan, keep the hounds in hand!" he enjoined the man. "If they show their teeth, knock 'em out! Tell the swabs I'm going ashore to arrange for rum and food."

"Aye-aye, Cap'n," said Black Dan.

Captain Honey dropped into the boat. His mind was so occupied with the serious problems of supply that, unwisely, he did not wait until the boat's crew had taken their places. So, when he looked up, he was amazed to see a row of all-bewhiskered faces hanging over the rail, looking down at him, grinning like gargoyles. He glared up, dropping one hand to a pistol.

"What's this—mutiny?" he snarled.

"Aye-aye, mutiny it is!" said the "trustworthy" Black Dan.

The pirate hesitated, his mouth full of unuttered—and unutterable—words. There were so many pistols hanging over the rail that it looked like a shelf in a pistol-factory. That was why he refrained from saying what he wanted to say.

"Why, now, my lads," he said instead, with a smile of extraordinary insincerity, "why, now, my lads, what d'ye want?"

Black Dan squirted a long jet of tobacco juice accurately, if impolitely, upon the Captain's hand.*

"We want a cap'n who can bring in some business," he said curtly, through his quid. "This is a pirate craft, this," he added, "not a pleasure yacht. D'ye see? And we're pirates, and want to be treated as sich. We've scoured the Spanish Main, and what's it brought us in? One cargo of Spanish onions! And only two of the crew cares for onions. We're pirates, not vegetarians. We've talked it over, and we're going to give ye a last chance to show yer mettle. Ye're going ashore to get supplies. If ye can get 'em and if ye can get news of a rich haul waiting for us, well and good —ye can come aboard, and we'll sail under ye for one more scour. But if ye can't—well, ye needn't come back. We'll elect a cap'n what has got more idee o' finding business."

Captain Honey ground his teeth, but concealed his rage.

"Well, my lads," he replied, with the grin of a famished hyena, "that's fair spoken. I understand ye. We'll abide by that."

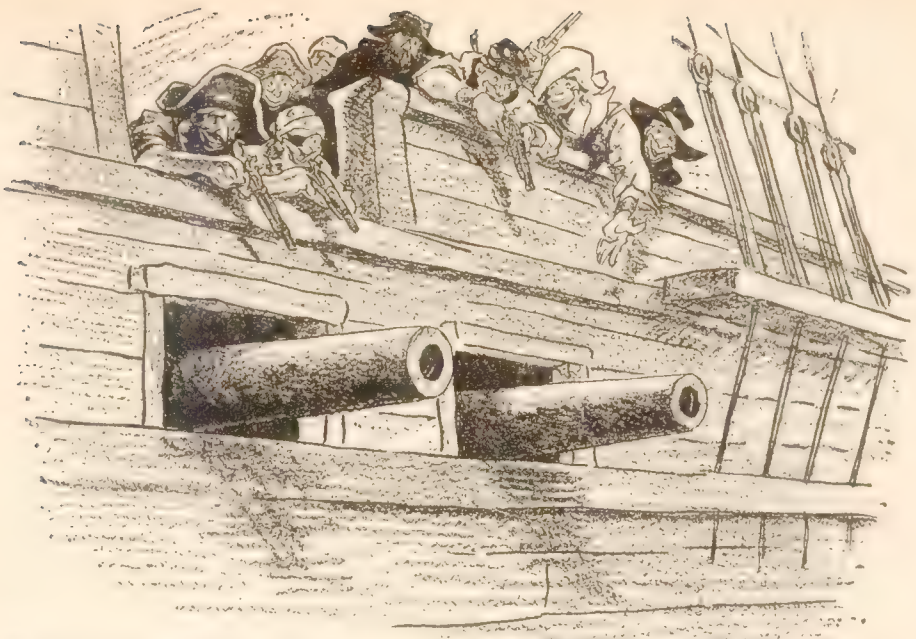
And then, being in too maniacal a rage to trust himself to say more, he took up the oars and began to row ashore, followed by the sardonic laughter of the ruffians so picturesquely grouped along the rail.

HE was still grinding his teeth as he stepped ashore, and made his way to a tavern, there to think things out. It was an awkward situation, and one of which he had had no previous experience. It was years since he had bought his supplies; hitherto he had always boarded some craft and helped himself. He hardly knew how to set about it.

Nevertheless he put a bold face upon it, and entering the tavern with a truculent swagger, ordered a skin of wine, and dashed down one of his last doubloons in payment as if he had not a care in the world.

The innkeeper, a Spaniard, bade him

*The date was 1688, and the men were pirates. If you had mentioned refinement to them, they would have thought it was something to eat.—AUTHOR.



"What's this—mutiny?" Captain Honey snarled. "Aye-aye, mutiny it is!" said the "trustworthy" Black Dan.

welcome with stately Spanish grace, and having bit the doubloon and rung it on the top of a cask, produced a goat-skin of wine, and set it before the pirate.

"Drink with me, señor!" said Captain Honey.

"Certainly, señor," responded the innkeeper, and kept his word.

Time passed, also several more skins of wine.* It is not necessary to give in detail the long conversation which passed between Captain Honey and the ruffianly-looking innkeeper. Briefly, it may be summed up by the statement that the pirate, encouraged thereto by certain suggestions made by the innkeeper, finally revealed the exceedingly awkward situation in which, through no fault of his own, he found himself—namely, his difficulty as to supplies. Naturally, however, he said nothing of his precarious position with his crew.

The Spaniard grew excited.

"If that is your only difficulty, señor, you have undoubtedly come to the right man to help you. For some time past I have been on the lookout for such a man as you."

"What for?" inquired Captain Honey.

The innkeeper got up, closed and bolted the door and put up the shutters. Then in a low voice he talked at some length.

*A "skin of wine" is an old Spanish measure, and should not be confused with the more modern and elastic measure known as a "skinful."—AUTHOR.

IT appeared that he knew a lady in need of a pirate. She was willing to pay an extravagant salary to the right man.

The lady in question (continued the innkeeper) needed the pirate for two purposes—namely, revenge and body-snatching. It was quite a simple little task she required done: merely the boarding of a certain ship which was shortly sailing for Spain from a port a little higher up the coast, and the capture and safe delivery to her of a passenger upon that ship. She would pay all expenses, a lump sum down, and finally a bonus for the job. The ship, its crew and cargo, Captain Honey could have to do with as he liked.

All this the Spanish innkeeper huskily communicated to the pirate over the third skin of wine.

Concealing his intense excitement and eagerness to accept, Mr. Honey pondered.

"H'm, yes," he said at last, with well-feigned hesitation. "It sounds all right. But it'll be an expensive job, d'ye see—very expensive. Still, I don't mind going into the figures and giving the lady an estimate. But I didn't have anything of the kind in mind just now. I really only looked in here to provision and then sail round to Nicaragua or the Brazils and sack a few towns. However, I don't know. If I'm delayed long over it, I shall have a bad trip round the Horn—the season's getting on, d'ye see? How much is this treasure, anyway? Let's talk figures and see where we stand."

The innkeeper agreed, but thought that the better plan would be to "talk figures" with the lady who was going to provide them; and he proposed that he should take the Captain to see her.

Mr. Honey was willing. He drained the skin of wine and rose.

"Cast off, then, señor," he said.

And the señor cast off.

IT appeared that the lady was a Spanish countess who lived upon her estate some miles from the town. It was a long, hot and dusty walk, and the price of the contract rose considerably before they got to their destination.

The Countess was at home, and received them immediately. During their walk, the innkeeper had explained to Mr. Honey the more intimate aspect of the situation. The man whom the countess wished captured was an Irish Spaniard who for some months had been affianced to the lady. He had been in extremely bad financial circumstances at the time he engaged himself to the Countess—so bad, indeed, that strictly speaking, he could not have been said to have any financial circumstances whatever, good or bad. Since then, however, aided by a little capital supplied by the lady, the Irish Don's luck had changed bewilderingly. Among other deals he had acquired a silver mine of incredible richness, and had loaded a ship with a cargo of ore which in itself was a fortune. The Countess, latterly, had fancied that the adoration of the Spanish Celt was lessening, and during the past few days, she had learned enough to make her suspect that when the silver ship sailed, Don Patricio Mulliganzo purposed unostentatiously sailing with it, never to return.

A GLANCE at the Countess assured Captain Honey that her suspicions probably were well-founded. The pirate found himself reflecting that if he were in Don Patricio's position, he too would act as Don Patricio was planning to act. For the Countess was no Venus nor Psyche. She was probably fifty years of age, and she was plentiful. Once, no doubt, she had been slim and slender, but it had been a long time ago. She was dark, with black brows that collided over her nose, and she possessed a jaw like unto the thick end of an anvil. Her manners were terse, and she gave one the impression of being a woman who was accustomed to expect obedience and to see that she received it. She seemed to understand men, too; for when the innkeeper, bowing, introduced Captain Honey, "the celebrated pirate," she immediately sent for a skin of wine, and removing the cigar she was smoking, waved it toward a seat.

"Be seated, Captain," she said, with a smile, and indicated the cigar-box.

The innkeeper explained the purpose of their visit, and the Countess listened attentively, brightening up visibly.

"You have done well, Miguel," she said. "Now be silent."

And turned to Captain Honey.

"And you, Captain—what is your price?"

"Well, I can see that it's going to be a very expensive job," said the pirate, very favorably impressed by the evidences of wealth surrounding him. "But I'll put in as low a price as I can, because I can sympathize with you. I can put myself in your position. I'll board the craft, capture Don Patricio, and deliver him to you for five thousand doubloons, cold cash, the necessary supplies for the voyage, and the sole right to Don Patricio's cargo and ship. And when all's said and done, I don't suppose I shall clear ten per cent on the deal," said the pirate, eying the Countess cautiously.

She reflected, staring hard at him.

"Yes," she said at last, "you're a pirate—a genuine pirate. But you ought to have been a shark! Yes, a shark! Now, look here: I'll give you a thousand doubloons net—five hundred down and five hundred when I get Don Patricio back. Take it or leave it."

The pirate rose.

"I'll leave it," he said.

With a wild twist he avoided her and leaped to the rail of the ship like a frightened cat.

"Sit down," said the Countess. "You'll take two thousand?"

The innkeeper, unobserved by his patroness, shook his head slightly.

"Not me!" said the pirate. "I should lose good money on the job."

The Countess sighed—but her eyes were hard.

"Do be reasonable, Captain," she said. "After all, there's a certain amount of sentiment in the thing. This man is going to be my husband—unless he slips us. Think of that. Come, now, Captain, you aren't going to charge a deserted woman more than two thousand five hundred for a little thing like that. —Is he, Miguel?"

"Alas!" Miguel bowed, thinking of his commission. "Pirates come high."

"Bah, mule-brain!" snapped the lady, quenching the innkeeper. She turned to Captain Honey again. "Well, have your own way—three thousand, cash, and say no more."

"Five!" corrected Mr. Honey stubbornly. "It's not much for a good husband in this part of the world."

"It's twice as much as Patricio's worth!"

Mr. Honey rose again.

"Well, now, we wont haggle. I'll knock you off ten per cent, and risk making a loss," he said finally.

Rather sourly she agreed.

THEN they went into details. Mr. Honey stated what he required in the way of supplies, and Miguel was sent out to fetch the estate overseer and the estate distiller. After an hour or two of hard work, the Countess had her carriage brought and gave the Captain a lift back to the harbor.

Mr. Honey hired two negroes off the beach to put him aboard. They did so foolishly, for when they asked for pay, he had them put in irons until the ship sailed, being short-handed.

It took Black Dan and the crew exactly one minute to perceive that Captain Honey was a very different man from the disheartened pirate they had put shore. He was in high spirits. He felled Black Dan to the deck the instant he came aboard, that individual having sneered at his returning empty-handed. And before the crew could retaliate, he pointed to several big boats full of supplies which had put out from a creek on the Countess' estate.

He briefly explained the position to his horde of ruffians; the prospect of immediate loot so completely altered their view of the morning that they gave him three comparatively hearty cheers before turning to get the supplies aboard.

"You'll have a lady aboard this trip, my hearties," said Captain Honey. "And you'll treat her as a lady. I'll split the man to the chin who doesn't—for she's financing the whole deal."

They understood, and fell to work.

LATE in the afternoon the Countess came aboard with a half-caste maid and a bodyguard of two menservants and Miguel the innkeeper, the three armed to the gums.

"The *Guadalquiver,* with Don Patricio on board, sailed for Spain this morning," said the Countess grimly to the pirate as he received her. "See to it that you catch her!"

"Aye-aye, ma'am!" replied Mr. Honey respectfully.

"I wish," continued the lady, "to address a few remarks to your crew. Kindly muster them."

The pirate was not in the habit of allowing anyone — feminine or masculine — to give instructions on his craft; but the Countess was different. She was in the habit of ruling with an iron rod a huge estate employing hundreds of men; and her manner—and appearance—was not unlike that of a troop sergeant-major of heavy dragoons. She was daunting, undeniably daunting. Besides, she was paying the bill. So the crew was mustered, as fine a collection of scalawags as the Spanish Main could produce.

"Men," said the Countess ironly, "you know why I am here, and what I am expecting you to do. In addition to the terms I have made with your captain, I shall pay a reward of fifty doubloons and a week's free rum to each of you when you have captured the heartless scoundrel who is deserting me—his promised wife. Do you understand that?"

There was a roar of delight from the ragged and thirsty pirate crew.

"Then see to it," said the Countess, and turned away.

All that night they pressed on under full sail. There were few vessels at that time upon the Spanish Main which the *Black Hake*—for such was the singular name of the pirate craft—could not easily outsail; and Captain Honey expected easily to run down the *Guadalquiver.*

THEY sighted her two days later, and after a long stern chase, drew near enough to fire a gun signaling her to stop.

For some hours, however, the silver-laden ship held to her course, ignoring the summons of the pirate. The wind dropped to a series of light airs alternating with calms, and favoring the *Guadalquiver,* the gap between the ships seemed, if anything, to increase.

Black Dan, in charge of the big bow chaser, suddenly lost patience and rammed home a solid shot, with the intention of bringing down the mast of the fleeing ship.

The Countess, who was standing by, noticed it, however, and seizing the big ramrod, was just in time to stretch the excitable Black Dan upon the deck.

"What is the use of a dead husband to me?" she demanded furiously of Captain Honey, who had approached. "Does that thick-witted relative of a mountain mule think I am spending something like six thousand doubloons to get Don Patricio killed?"

The pirate captain apologized; and, a breeze springing up at that moment, they ran alongside the *Guadalquiver,* and ordered her to heave to.

Seeing that resistance was not merely useless but suicidal, the captain of the *Guadalquiver* obeyed; and presently the Countess, Captain Honey and a choice assortment of pirates boarded her.

It occurred to Mr. Honey that the *Guadalquiver* did not look much like a ship laden with silver ore—and smelled even less so.

"Where's Don Patricio Mulliganzo?" demanded the Countess abruptly of the Captain, a simple-looking person with watery eyes and unhandseled whiskers.

"Don Patricio who?" asked the man, plainly puzzled.

"Mulliganzo, you swab—the Irish don you're hiding aboard this craft!" roared Mr. Honey, a horrid doubt assailing him.

"There's no such name on this ship," said the captain.

"Bah!" went the Countess. "Don't waste time! Send for him!"

"I tell ye there's no man of such name on the ship," reiterated the watery-eyed one. —"Is there, Jake?" he added, appealing to his first mate, a lean, goat-bearded Yankee, who stood close by.

"Nary," said Jake.

Captain Honey pushed forward.

"And I suppose you'll deny that you haven't got a cargo of silver ore belonging to Don Patricio?" he said sarcastically.

The watery-eyed captain pulled at his whiskers.

"Aye-aye!" he murmured. "There's no silver ore aboard this boat. In fact," he continued, "seeing that you're from a pirate craft, and mebbe in a hurry, I may as well tell you that my cargo is horns, hoofs and hides—spoiled hides—consigned to the Bermondsey Glue Company of London."

"I don't believe it!" screamed the Countess.

The *Guadalquiver's* captain turned to his mate.

"Open a couple of the hatches. That'll convince her," he ordered. . . . . It did.

A PERFUNCTORY search revealed to Captain Honey that he had captured the wrong *Guadalquiver,* and since pirates have little or no use for horns, hides and hoofs, he had all the portable property of value aboard handed over to him, and with the seething Countess and the sullen boat's-crew, returned to the *Black Hake* with a sinking heart.

Black were the scowls which greeted him, and fiercely the pirate's crew muttered their disappointment.

Once on deck, he turned apologetically to the Countess, but she laughed bitterly.

"I don't want apologies!" she snarled. "It's a husband I came to find—not apologies!"

Black Dan, with a lump on his brow the size of a turkey's egg, stepped forward.

"Well, lady," he said, "if that's all you want, why not marry our captain? He's no use for a pirate. We can spare him. Take him, and settle the bill with us!"

There was a roar of pleased acquiescence from the crowd of pirates.

The Countess seemed struck with the idea, and turned, staring at Mr. Honey with a new interest.

A member of the crew pushed forward—a tough-looking ruffian with a broken nose and only one and a half ears.

"I may not look it," he said, "but I was a parson once. If there is anything I can do, I shall be only too pleased."

Mr. Honey read his fate in the melting eye of the Countess.

She nodded with an unnerving smile.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I think that will be the best plan."

She leaned toward the unfortunate Mr. Honey, but with a wild twist he avoided her, and dashing his right fist into the face of Black Dan and his left into that of the *soi-disant* parson (re-breaking that individual's nose), he leaped to the rail of the ship like a frightened cat.

There was a sudden splash. Captain Honey felt the blue waters close over his head. Weighted with the battery of pistols and daggers in his belt, he went straight down. He was only conscious of a feeling of relief. Just as his senses left him, a thought flashed through his head that probably now the crew would offer Black Dan to the Countess rather than lose the contract money. And they would take care that he did not escape. The pirate captain chuckled, and proceeded on his journey—not to the bottom of the Spanish Main, but to his Twentieth Century chair in the Twentieth Century flat in Twentieth Century London, where he awoke almost, it seemed, before he had finished chuckling over the certain fate of the treacherous Black Dan.

MR. HONEY sat still for a moment, thinking, and bitterly disappointed.

"Is it possible that I have been a pirate, and not only a pirate but an incompetent one!"

He sighed, and put the bottle of pills in his drawer.

"It's very discouraging, Peter," he said to his cat. "Very! If I have not been a great man in any of my previous existences, at least I expected to find that I have been more or less respectable. However, time will show," he concluded.

And so saying, he fired the cat out of the study, switched off the light and went thoughtfully to bed.

"Roughing It in Rome," an even more remarkable adventure in reincarnation, will be described by Mr. Atkey in the next, the July, issue.

Lords of Misrule

A stirring story of the American army's adventure in Siberia—of an amazing international situation; of lone patrols and sudden savage battles in the snow; of death and of victory.

By CAPTAIN R. ERNEST DUPUY

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

DEATH rode the night in Vladivostok. His icy breath was in the wind that swept the Slevansky Prospekt, his chill fingers molded the snowdrifts that spewed the streets. Grant shivered beneath the fleece lining of his overcoat as he led his patrol—a corporal and three men—through the dark and deserted thoroughfare.

Revolution and counter-revolution were in the air. Over the wires from Omsk had come word across the wastes of the Amur valley that the Kolchak government was retiring before the Red hosts of the approaching Soviet army. In the city itself rose murmuring of rebellion against Rozanoff, Kolchak's tyrant of the local White government. The Zemstvos—the people's councils—it was said, were offering General Gaida, local leader of the Czechs, command of a new, republican rule. Just what that wily officer—the youngest and most aggressive of the Czech commanders—would do, remained a secret, just as he himself, behind his guard of stolid soldiery, remained unseen.

And tomorrow would be Armistice Day—the first anniversary of the collapse of Germany! Back in the States there would be rejoicing over a year of peace, but here in Siberia American troops were still in the field—fighting partisan raids on the railways, avoiding squabbles with belligerent, sullen Allies; dodging the bullets of both Bolshevists and Whites, trying to mind their own business while Jap and Briton and Frenchman each strove to make them cat's-paws to pull the Russian chestnut out of the fire!

FACTIONAL fighting in the city did not interest Grant beyond the necessity of keeping from unnecessary conflict with either side—the American policy which General Graves was adhering to through thick and thin. No, Grant and his men were after other game—and odd game, too.

"A man who will ask you what is the favorite breakfast-food in New England."

Grant had almost laughed in the major's face when he had been given those instructions in the G-2 office. And that keen-faced officer himself had smiled.

"You know what the answer to this is, I suppose?" he had queried.

"Sure. Pie."

"Yes, to a New Englander that might seem the correct answer," said the major. "But you are to tell him something else—your reply will be—'corn-pone.' "

"It may seem funny to you, lieutenant," the intelligence officer had continued. "But in reality it's serious business. And you will be expected to carry it out seriously."

Grant grunted to himself now as he recalled his instructions. It was like this topsy-turvy land to have some silly business like this turn up. "New England breakfast"—"corn-pone!" Bah! Ah, well, after all, he was a soldier. His was not to question, he supposed. But the whole thing would seem much more humorous in front of a hot fire and over a warm drink than out here in the biting cold. He stumbled on down the avenue, staring at the cross-street signs. Yes, here they were—even the funny Russian characters could not disguise this street—"Peter and Paul." It was down this narrow way, quite unworthy of its high-sounding appellation, that he was to take his patrol. The little group swung to the left. The radium dial of Grant's watch gleamed nine o'clock. Good—he was on time. "Peter and Paul street, at nine o'clock," he had been instructed.

The corporal jogged Grant's elbow.

"Something—some one—coming down the street, sir."

"Number Twenty-seven—this street," he gasped. "They're trapped!" Grant let the limp form down and rose.

Grant, peering into the night, saw a shadowy form dodging toward them through the corridors of piled snow. And as he looked two yellow-red flashes stabbed the gloom behind the fugutive. With a vicious *whirp* something zipped past his ear. *Bang-bang!* The figure ahead of them stumbled, slid to the ground, half rose and fell again.

The patrol, flattened against the snow drift, froze like bird-dogs on a point. Something dark flitted toward the sprawling man; to their ears came an American voice.

"Help!" And again—"*Help!*"

Grant's automatic leaped from his holster as he dived for the spot, his four men on his heels.

"Help! For God's sake, help!"

The voice came from the prone figure. The officer's pistol crashed at the lurking shadow, which ducked out of sight.

Grant dropped to his knee beside the form, his men dodging past at his command. He bent over the body.

"We're Americans—what is it?" he demanded.

The figure squirmed and groaned.

"What — what's — New England — oh, God! I'm finished—breakfast—"

Grant's arms half lifted the man against his knee.

"Corn-pone," he whispered in the ear of the head rolling on his arm, mentally cursing the silly mummery that should interfere in a matter of life and death.

The man in his arms wriggled, his movement eliciting another groan of agony.

"Number Twenty-seven—this street," he gasped. "They're trapped—take this."

GRANT felt something pressed into his groping hand—a metal coin of some sort. The wounded man stiffened, then went limp. The officer did not need further examination to know that he held a dead man in his arms.

A rifle barked. Grant let the limp form down and rose. His corporal was beside him.

"Couple of them there, sir," he reported. "Jones took a pot-shot, but missed them. They've dodged down the street."

"Keep the men together and under cover," ordered Grant. With his flashlight he read the number of the house opposite them—3. The next house, Number 5. Twenty-seven would be down the street—the same direction in which the mysterious assailants had vanished.

"We're going down that way, corporal," he ordered and started off, sliding cautiously between the snowbanks. There was

nothing he could do for the poor fellow lying there. When they came back—if they came back—they could pick him up. For the present he must go on. What deadly hide-and-seek game was he playing?

"Do what your man says," had been the instructions. Did they cover such a circumstance as this? He must assume that they did.

"Number 27—they're trapped!"

Seemingly the mumbled words still rang in his ears. They must find Number 27 then. And anyone outside the house, or opposing their passage, must be considered as an enemy. That meant, in this day and place, shooting first and asking questions later; there were only two kinds of people in Vladivostok now—the quick and the dead.

And as they went he whispered his instructions to his men. Some one trapped in Number 27—some one they must rescue. No need to say more. His men knew the situation as well as he did.

FIFTY yards—a hundred—and still no sign of life in the black street. Another flash of the searchlight. Number 21. Three doors farther, then.

"Easy, corporal," Grant cautioned. "Almost there—watch out!"

Somewhere down the street—very near, a whistle trilled; an odd, shrill, bird-like call. Like an echo, a door banged. Grant threw the beam of the pocket-flash where he thought the entrance of Number 27 ought to be. Into the flickering light popped several human forms, rushing out of the doorway. One stopped, lifted an arm and hurled something behind him into the house. From across the street a pistol crashed. The rifles of the patrol cracked viciously as the soldiers loosed pot-shots at the fleeing men and at the attacker opposite them.

A sheet of flame split the night, leaping from that doorway, and a rocking blast crashed on their ear-drums, reverberating through the street. That last man had thrown a hand-grenade as he fled from the building! Grant and his men hugged the snowdrifts, their blinded eyes blinking in the darkness.

They held their positions for an instant, then something dark moved, limned against the white snow, just across the street. The corporal fired. An unearthly screech answered the shot and the black thing jumped and laid quiet.

The patrol slipped down opposite where the grenade had burst and crouched again.

"I'm going in," whispered Grant. "One man watch up the street, one down, one the opposite side. You cover me, Corporal, but don't follow unless I call."

Pistol in one hand, flash in the other, the lieutenant crawled into the shattered doorway, stinking with the explosive fumes, over the litter of debris. Gaining the entrance he lay and listened. Something murmured inside—a groaning whisper. Grant took a chance.

"Amerikansky!" he called, cautiously.

There was no answer. Still that faint groaning murmur came to his ears. Again he called, and a slight movement somewhere inside followed. Some one spoke—an unintelligible sing-song.

"Amerikansky!" repeated the officer for the third time. His flashlight for a moment illuminated the vestibule, the shattered door sagging on its hinges, the mess of splinters and crumpled woodwork left by the grenade's burst.

"If you are an American," some one said in perfect English, not ten feet from him, "you should have a token to show me."

Grant bethought himself of the coin that the dying fugitive had shoved into his hand. He fumbled in his pocket, found it, and lying on the ground, his pistol against his chest, held it out. With his other hand he once more winked his electric flash on the coin, or rather, half of a coin, about the size of a silver dollar, of copper, and broken jaggedly.

"Please come in," invited the unknown. Grant wriggled through the wrecked entrance and scrambled to his feet in the darkness. It was eerie work, standing in that black hall. What was he running into?

"Who is there?" he demanded. "What is the matter?"

"Put on your light," was the answer. "They are gone for the instant. But you must be quick. They will return."

HE flicked on the searchlight. In front of him stood an odd figure—a man clad in the quilted outer garments and wool hat of a Mongolian wanderer. The stern face and black eyes that confronted him, however, were those of a man of education—the features almost European—no coolie, this. In one outstretched hand the other held a fragment of coin. The other hand, by his side, held a pistol.

"Assure yourself," he cautioned. "They will fit."

Grant extended the portion of coin he

"Amerikansky!" repeated the officer. His flashlight illuminated the mess of splinters and crumpled woodwork left by the grenade's burst.

had and the bits of metal coupled into one another in perfect junction.

"Good," said the Mongol. "You and your people arrived just in time. You will escort us to safety, I pray?"

Again Grant asked an explanation, but the other man cut him short.

"You had instructions to meet some one in this street, sir," he answered. "You have met him or you would not have the coin. If you escort me—and my companion here—to our destination, you will have fulfilled your duty. I can answer no questions. But please, please, be quick. The people who trapped us here will return in force sufficient to finish the work you interrupted."

Again Grant had to make a decision. What all this mad jumble might mean was, after all, none of his business. He had been ordered to find some one and obey his orders. He had found his man. And before he died that individual had done his best to impart instructions. There was nothing to do but carry on.

"All right," said Grant. "Let's go. Where's the other man?"

"Here," and the Mongol pointed to a corner, where the flashlight showed the form of another man sprawling. The officer bent over him. Hit apparently by some splinter from the grenade explosion, he was unable to rise. It was his groaning that Grant had heard.

Grant hurried to the door where he found the anxious corporal. There had been no further movement from the attackers. The corporal and the Mongol gathered up the wounded man—also Mongolian from his costume—and carried him into the street, Grant bringing up the rear.

The mysterious stranger mentioned an address in another street, across the main thoroughfare. This fell in with Grant's wishes, for he wanted to rescue, if possible, the body of the man he had come to meet.

Unmolested they reached the spot where the dead man lay. Grant had been worried how he was to bring the body along and still put up a fight if attacked. The unwounded Mongol solved that problem by tossing his wounded companion on his shoulder without apparent effort, releasing the corporal.

"You lead the way, Corporal," directed Grant. "We'll bring up the rear."

In this formation they gained the Slevansky Prospekt, turned down it for three blocks and then up a side street. A few yards up the street the Mongol stopped.

"We leave you here," said he. "We are

in perfect safety now. I thank you for your help. Please tell me your name that I may know to whom I am indebted."

The man was apparently not even out of breath. Grant marveled at the physique that could tote more than one hundred fifty pounds of dead weight on his shoulder for a good quarter of a mile without turning a hair. Grant gave his name. The Mongol stepped to a door and tapped on it. The Americans heard a whispered interrogation, saw the door swing open, to close on the man and his burden. Then they hurried on to their own destination.

IN his quarters the next morning Grant woke from a vivid dream that he was leading a parade of Mongols down Vladivostok's main street, while Generals Rozanoff and Gaida, dressed as ballet-girls, danced in front of them, scattering flowers in their path. At last Rozanoff hurled a great rose full in his face, the flower turning into a hand grenade which burst with a roar! He sat up, blinking, the noise still ringing in his ears, to hear a dry rattling outside. He was listening to small-arms fire. Another boom betokened artillery.

He turned out with a bound. The Gaida revolution was on! The city was in a turmoil. From some of the public buildings a new green flag—the colors of the Siberian republic—was floating. Detachments of Rozanoff's loyal White Russians were hurrying here and there, in desultory conflict with the Zemstvo insurgents of the Czech general.

By noon the situation was getting worse. Machine-guns were chattering at random everywhere and the population was huddled behind closed shutters and barred doors. Frantic calls from Americans cut off in various parts of town were coming in, and patrols were going out, joining the other allied troops in general police work, but taking no part in the internecine warfare.

The Rozanoff faction held the upper hand in the city and the Czech national council, adhering to its policy of neutrality, held its troops out of the conflict. The only Czechs engaged were those of Gaida's own bodyguard. The Zemstvo forces, without training, melted away. Then the firing in and about the railway station and yards began to increase in volume.

Heavy booming later in the afternoon indicated a new development. A Russian gunboat in the Amur River, for no reason at all had begun to shell the railway station, tumbling her projectiles on friend and foe alike, as if in indication that this was to be no private war but a free-for-all.

Grant realized that the revolution had come at an embarrassing moment for the American forces. There was at this time but one American battalion in the city and it was short of men. A transport had come in the previous morning and the time-expired men, going home for discharge, had been placed on board, while the replacements she had brought had been put, in accordance with the usual routine, in the detention barracks at Diomedes Bay, commonly known to the Wolf Hounds as "Diabetes." There they would remain for ten days in quarantine before being distributed to their units.

To call back the veterans from the transport would create a great deal of perhaps unnecessary work. To throw the new men into the ranks without preliminary training might, if anything serious happened, lower the efficiency of the units to an alarming extent. Headquarters stood pat until the middle of the afternoon. Then things began to hum. Anything might happen—the troops must be ready. Into the office of Grant's outfit—M Company—came a phone message:

"Replacements coming from Diomedes Bay barracks, to fill your command to war strength. Equip them and stand by prepared to move on five minutes' notice. Full field equipment."

By the time the trucks came roaring up with the new men M Company was ready to receive them. As each man went through the door a non-com queried him as to his job in France. Specialists such as machine-gunners, one-pounder crews, Stokes mortar men, grenadiers and all the other technical details of the doughboys were routed one way for their special accoutrements, the others were ushered into the main storeroom of the old Russian barracks where the equipment was laid out in neat piles.

In the rush there was no time to measure for sizes or fit. Big men were stuffed into overcoats whose buttons strained—little runts tugged desperately at web equipment to shorten it to their girth. And as each man got his belt on and hung his two bandoliers over his shoulders—the ammunition complement usual for field duty in Siberia—he was pushed into another room, receiving, as he passed, his rifle, with the shouted warning:

"There's a clip in that gun, and the safety's set. Watch it!"

The buzz of wonderment from the new arrivals, the gradual increase of tenseness as they realized that they were being groomed for possible action, combined to pass on a nervous atmosphere which, if these soldiers had been recruits might have led to weakening results. But these men were veterans and they fell into their places in the thinned ranks of M Company with the precision of old soldiers. Muttered jokes at the ill-fitting equipment ran up and down the lines as the old men took the measure of their new comrades. The sight warmed Grant's heart. He wished that he might be with them, but his work lay elsewhere.

When he had made his report to the intelligence officer the night before he had again received specific if puzzling instructions.

"Grant," said the Major, "the dead man you have brought in was a secret agent of the State Department, engaged in making certain investigations in Mongolia. The details of those investigations he was to bring to us. What they were I do not know. But they must have been of vital importance to some one, or he would not have been attacked. He had sent a message asking for an escort, but it was not believed that there was any danger facing him other than what might be expected in Vladivostok at this time."

The officer paused, slowly turning over in his hands the broken token that Grant had handed him in making his report.

"Have you any idea what this represents?" he demanded.

Grant examined the coin. It was of copper and bore on one side a head—the head of an angry god; on the other a swastika. The break was fairly in the middle and both objects were recognizable.

"I know the swastika sign," said Grant. "It's a sort of good luck symbol. The god-face I do not know."

"The angry god," explained the intelligence officer, "is Maitreya—the angry Buddha, the Buddha of Tibet and Lamaism. The swastika is a favorite symbol of Lamaism. Our man certainly had had something to do with the Buddhist monks in Mongolia—the all-powerful rulers of that wild region. What that was, of course, we do not know. We may deduce further that the men he was with must represent some faction of Lamaism."

Again the Major played with the coin.

"Now then, we must know what our man tried to tell us. Whatever it was he carried it in his brain—there is nothing on him—no clew. There is one possible way to find out. The men he was with can tell us, if they will. And in whom would they confide more readily than in the man who rescued them, taking up the task of the man who died? Do you get me, Lieutenant?" he demanded.

"Why—why, I think so, Major," Grant slowly replied. "It's up to me to get in touch with these people—is that it?"

"That's it. But—this is somewhat outside the line of duty. There is no knowing where this may lead the man who undertakes it. You are the logical man for the detail. Do you want it, Grant?"

"Of course," was the Lieutenant's reply.

"Good. I thought that was what you would say. In addition, you should have some one with you—some one on whom you can rely. Have you any suggestion?"

"Yes sir. Corporal Mumford of M Company. He was with me last night. He's a good soldier, speaks a little Russian, and is afraid of nothing."

"Very good. You and Mumford will be placed on detached service. You will remain ostensibly with your company, but will be free to come and go as you please. I will see that the necessary instructions are given your company commander."

CHAPTER II

GRANT was still puzzling out what he should do, while the hum of preparation went on about him in the barracks. The open outbreak in the city had cramped his first idea of going directly to the house in which his mystery man had taken shelter. And the puzzling token was burning a hole in his pocket. What was this all about? What did Buddhas and Lamas have to do with Siberia and the United States? Would the mystery man take the first step by trying to communicate with him? In view of that possibility he had left word with the guard that anyone asking for him should be held for his inspection. It was dusk when the corporal of the guard informed Grant that there was a "dirthy Chinee" at the main barrack gate asking for him. At the gate the lieutenant found huddled in a corner a ragged boy—Chinese or Mongol, he was not sure which. The boy at the sight of the officer rose and sidled up to him, while the corporal glared disapprovingly.

"That's all right, Corporal," said Grant.

He queried the boy in English and in his rather feeble Russian. But the youngster, his beady eyes gleaming, stared in the officer's face without replying. Grant glanced at the urchin's grimy paws. In them he caught a glimpse of copper. A light dawned on him.

He pulled from his own pocket the broken token and held it where the lad could see it. With a squeal the boy shoved forward what he had been holding—the other half of the coin. Then with one clutching hand on Grant's blouse he motioned toward the outside.

So his mysterious friend had taken the first step. Or was it a trap? Grant dismissed the second thought. He informed his captain that he was going, and took the waiting Mumford with him. Both men were armed with their pistols. He motioned the guide forward. "All right, Corporal. Open up and let us get out."

The corporal of the guard grumblingly opened the door and as they passed muttered a word of warning. The Lieutenant was popular with the men of M Company.

" 'Twud be wise av the Lootenint wud kape a weather oi liftin'. There's too much promisc'us shootin' goin' on out there. Sure, an' a couple av squads wud be a hilp to yez!"

"We'll be all right, Corporal," laughed Grant. "Thanks for the warning." And the gate clanged shut behind them.

It was now pitch dark outside. If lights were burning in any of the houses, it was behind carefully shuttered and curtained windows. Of street lights there were none. Intermittent small arms firing kept clattering from the direction of the railway yards. Once in a while the staccato tapping of a "typewriter" told its tale of machine-guns sweeping a street somewhere. Now and then the boom of a gunboat shelling the station came to his ears. Turning up their fleece-lined collars Grant and the corporal plunged into the bitter cold, while their guide slipped noiselessly ahead of them.

Only once Grant spoke.

"You know this town, Corporal. You'll have to keep your eyes peeled and don't hesitate to give me directions if we want to get somewhere in a hurry. Two heads are better than one. Make sure you know where we are all the time."

FOR a good fifteen minutes they tramped, turning up corners, slipping through alleys, until at last they halted at the basement door of a gloomy building. It was here they had left the mystery man last night. Their guide knocked softly, whispered something and the portal swung back. The pair slipped in behind the boy to find themselves in a dimly lit passage. Behind them the door clicked shut. A burly Mongol, armed to the teeth, barred their way. Grant said something to him, but the man made no effort to let them past. Even the boy's expostulations had no avail.

The guard's little piglike eyes gleamed wickedly and Grant noticed other wild-looking figures gathering behind him. He leisurely pulled something from his pocket and stretched his hand to the guard. A claw-like paw picked from his palm the token. The man fumbled with it, raised it to his eyes, then handed it back with a grunt and stepping aside, waved them on. Grant caught an impression of savage armed figures lurking in doorways as they followed the boy down the passage to its end. At a curtained door the boy scratched. A voice inside—an old voice, languid, tired, gentle—answered. Pulling aside the curtain the boy, bowing low, ushered them in.

They stood in a large room, fitted with oriental draperies. Priceless rugs strewed the floor, age-old hangings covered the walls. On a dais at the far end was seated an odd figure. An ancient man, clad in brick-red vestments, richly embroidered, with a yellow helmet-shaped cap on his head, was seated there, hunched up in a cushioned chair. One hand held the peacock-feathered staff of a Lama abbot of high rank, the other hung languidly on the arm of his chair. To one side a shrine held a jade image of Buddha, with candles flickering about it. The scent of incense hung heavily in the atmosphere. Behind the dais stood a group of Lama priests, their vestments also of red and with caps of coarser yellow material on their heads.

Grant gazed about him with intense curiosity. What in the world did this mean? He looked for the man of last night, but his face was not among those who surrounded the dais. The benignant, ascetic face of the old man sitting there gazed on them. Then he spoke a few words in the same strange tongue that the man of the night before had first used. One of the priests, advancing, led the Americans to the foot of the dais.

Again the old man spoke—to them, this time. Grant, who had doffed his cap, bowed and gestured his inability to understand.

A burly Mongol, armed to the teeth, barred their way.

"Perhaps, my son," broke in the old man, in French, "we might better be able to converse in this tongue."

Grant brightened up.

"It would be better, father," he answered in the same language. The hawk-faced young corporal, who did not understand French, gazed about him wonderingly, fur cap in hand. It was non-regulation to take off the cap, under arms, of course. But Corporal Mumford was not going to argue the matter when his lieutenant had done the same thing.

"I want first," said the ancient, "to thank you for your assistance last night to my messengers. The ways of Divine Will are inscrutable. The Wheel has brought to me, at the opportune moment, a champion. I bow most humbly to the Word."

HE paused for a moment, then went on:

"My son, upon me, the unworthy representative of the ruler of Buddhism, has fallen a great task. The *Cheptsung Tampa Khutukhtu,* of Outer Mongolia, the living reincarnation, has sent me to Siberia, searching for the truth. To Him have come emissaries from the Island Empire—Japan, seeking to enroll Him on the side of the domination of Asia by the Asiatics. Between Mongol, Chinese and Japanese lies, of course, something of a racial bond. But sad experience has taught the others that where Japan is concerned all considerations other than Japanese interests fade."

The thin voice went on, while Grant's hair rose on his head as he listened.

"Japan tells the *Khutukhtu* that in occupation of Siberia she means nothing else than the liberation of a tide of racial freedom that will sweep over the plains of Mongolia, through China, on into India, removing a vast empire from foreign control. Japan has invited His Holiness to see for Himself what is going on in Siberia. He in His wisdom has chosen me, Chu Fang Ling, most unworthy of His servants and *Kempo* of the Lamist monastery at Urga, to be His investigator."

Again the venerable abbot paused; in a moment he continued:

"I have come, I have wandered, I have

seen. Buffeted in this city of fear, traveling over sections of Siberia, I have seen all things in turmoil—white man fighting white man, nations fearing each the other. Only one nation have we voted whose intentions would appear to be honest. It is yours.

"Your country, so far away, has shown her power before. We saw her troops march into Peking years ago. We have seen them in the Philippines. Wherever they have been we have seen a straightforward rule. But here they are as a drop of water in a torrent, compared with the troops of Nippon. The Japanese tell us that they are the weakest of all—that they can be discounted, brushed aside. Furthermore, the Japanese tell us that when they are ready they will break all bonds with their allies and will take over by force all Siberia. The Japanese tell us the time is ripe, and have invited us to see for ourselves. The move will begin tonight, here in Vladivostok."

Grant wet lips dry with excitement.

"Japanese troops will take the railway station, and that accomplished, will set in motion their troops everywhere in Siberia."

Grant was staggered. What could he say—or do? There must be action at once; an alarm. But why should this old Mongol tell him this? His mind was in a whirl. The abbot read his bewilderment.

"I see that you wonder why I should tell you this, my son," said he. "I tell it because the messenger you saved last night brought me word that Chinese troops have taken Urga and imprisoned the *Khutukhtu,* the living Buddha. Chinese—but doubtless actuated by the Japanese. And I fear me we will see not the liberation of Asia, but the establishment of a great Japanese empire, grinding Asia under heel. But if America, protector of the weaker nations, checkmates this move, we will have peace.

"I tell you that Asia is watching. If Japanese troops take the railway station tonight, your allied forces will go down like dust, and that spark will fly across the wastes as the match to the magazine of millions who are waiting to strike!" The old man's voice, which had thundered out his last remark, fell.

"I am tired, my son. I have placed the fate of Asia on the Wheel. Soon I must go at the invitation of the Japanese general in command here to see with my own eyes what is to be. Go in peace, youth from the Western world, who holds the symbol of the Sacred Sign."

HE waved his peacock baton. Two priests rushed forward. Grant bowed and the priests ushered the pair out of the room and down the long, dim passage. And as they walked Grant was talking—talking fast—in low, quick-clipped words that stung in Corporal Mumford's brain.

"Listen—don't take time to answer. The Japs are going to seize the railway station. We must get men there first or all hell will break! We're safe in here, but I think I saw a Jap uniform flitting in front of us. The instant you get out of the door run for the nearest barracks—get men to the station—use my name, say anything—but for God's sake get men to the station!"

He jammed something into Mumford's hand—the token.

"Show that to any company commander. They'll do what you say if you show this. Drop anyone who tries to stop you! You must get through! Understand?"

"Check. And the Lieutenant?"

"I'm going to the railway station."

They were almost at the end of the passage now. Grant's hand gripped the corporal's arm.

"Good luck, Mumford. Get through!"

The door opened. The cold night air flicked into their faces, in an invigorating draft. Grant pushed the corporal out ahead of him. "Go on!" he hissed.

AND without casting a backward look, Mumford started up the dark street at a jogtrot. In front of him loomed vague forms. Four men hurled themselves on him, hampering themselves by their very impetuosity. One he caught full in the face with his drawn automatic and he dropped with a yelp of anguish. One he kicked in the shins, but the other two hung on, dragging his arms down. Like a stone from a catapult some one barged into the struggling trio and Grant's pistol crashed twice on enemy heads. Mumford shook their falling forms from him.

"Don't stop, Corporal. For God's sake —go!"

Grant's voice rose in a note of pain. Mumford saw other forms materialize behind his lieutenant. For a split second he hesitated, then discipline asserted itself. He was a soldier and he had a mission. He went running away into the darkness, but his eyes were wet, for he had caught a glimpse of the swirl of men overwhelming Grant and he felt sure that Asiatic knives were hacking at his officer!

Through the deserted streets Mumford raced, with pounding heart and gasping sobs, bending his steps towards L Company's barracks, the nearest to the railway station. It was a long half-mile and he was winded when he got near it. Then the thought flashed through his mind that this was L Company's night for M. P. duty on Kopek Hill! There would be only a handful of men remaining in barracks! Well, perhaps he could gather a few anyway. He neared the corner, just a block from the barracks. A flicker of light met his eyes. Odd, that light. What was it? He turned the corner and the light flared up—flames from the barracks windows, roaring flames! No help from L Company tonight!

DESPERATELY he turned to make his way to his own company—M—leaving behind him the gathering street crowd and the few soldiers working like demons to fight the fire. Eight men were dying in that trap, as he was to learn later; eight men caught asleep in their beds! But the corporal had no time to speculate on what was happening there. M Company was the only hope now, for the other companies were quartered too far away to be of use.

The Japanese barracks lay on his route, and he made a detour about them, noting as he did that a column of motor lorries was rumbling into the barracks gate. Their movement was about to begin!

Staggering like a drunken man he plunged on, his fumbling fingers casting off first his belt and gun, then his hampering overcoat. That weight off, he felt better. With gritted teeth and clenched hands he lunged ahead. He had been running for hours, it seemed, when the old Russian barracks where M was quartered loomed in front of him and he caromed into the postern gate and the arms of an anxious company commander.

"What's up, Corporal? There's a fire back there and the telephone line is cut. I have just sent patrols out. Quick, man, what's up?"

But Mumford could only gasp.

"Railway station—Lieutenant Grant says —railway—we must take—before Japs!" And he pressed into the Captain's hand the token that Grant had handed to him.

The Captain gazed at it in the light of the lantern held by the sergeant of the guard. A broken copper piece, about the size of a silver dollar, with part of the image of an angry Buddha leering up at him.

He turned to the bugler beside him.

"Sound 'Recall' for those patrols! Sergeant, turn out the company!" He fairly shook the panting corporal. "To the railway station? Any other word from Grant?"

Platoon leaders' and section chiefs' whistles were shrilling now and the barracks was vomiting armed men into the courtyard —armed men who fell into ranks with the precision of veteran troops.

"You must go by motor—Japs have trucks!"

Mumford was attempting to catch his breath and tell his story at the same time.

"We can't, man! You know that. There are trucks here, but the motor transport men are not quartered with us. We'll have to march!"

"Wont do—wont do! You'll be too late. The Japs have trucks, I tell you!" gasped Mumford.

"Beg your pardon, sir."

The Captain turned angrily at the interruption. A Canadian soldier stood before him.

"Begging your pardon, sir, I've heard the conversation. There's five of us here been havin' a chat and a smoke with some of your men. We're transport men, an' if you need drivers, we're here!"

"You're on, soldier! There are your trucks, oiled and gassed. Get going!"

And in as many minutes, five trucks, crammed with Yankee fighting men and driven by Canadian chauffeurs, went rumbling out of M Company's barracks, to go thundering through the streets of Vladivostok, with flaring lights and screaming sirens.

"It's 'Two Nines,' feller!" yelped an ex-New York City fireman. "General alarm from the Battery to the Bronx!"

And as they went roaring into the night, Mumford on the leading truck with the Captain, pointed down a cross-street, where three blocks over, paralleling their course, another fleet of motor-trucks was racing.

"The Japs!"

WHEN Grant went down under a wave of adversaries, he expected every instant to feel the searing thrust of a knife-blade. Whether or not his attackers were afraid to use steel for fear of injuring one of their own number, or because they were confident of the press of numbers, he never knew. Fists ground into his face, groping hands sought his throat as he writhed and twisted, striving with every nerve to shake

them off. It was futile. In an instant he was helpless under the pile, half stunned and thoroughly winded.

A door banged near by, a high-pitched voice rang out. Came a rush of feet and an odd, throaty war-cry: *"Cha! Cha!"*

Cha! Cha! Kill! Kill! The words were Chinese. But mingled in the hurly-burly was another jargon. The new attack swept the tangle of his original assailants from him and he felt the grip of friendly hands dragging him out of the mêlée. A boy's voice called in his ear—the voice of his guide. Grant knew no Mongolian. He resorted to Chinese, asking for the railway.

"Farchar?" he queried. *"Farchar?"*

The lad squealed an assent and grabbing his hand fairly dragged him down the alleyway, away from the struggling group. Grant plunged recklessly through the tangle of streets. At last they emerged into a square and the boy halted. He pointed across the way. Grant hurried over to a long, ornate building—the railway station!

Even in the dark the piles of debris underfoot told of the fighting that had gone on during the day. The shells of the Amur River gunboat had sent bricks and rubble slithering about the square. Several times he almost stumbled over sprawling bodies —for the most part Chinese, for the brunt of the fighting had fallen upon the coolies employed in the yards.

HERE and there a street light still flared, but the neighborhood seemed deserted. Far up the line could be heard intermittent firing, where Rozanoff's men were driving back the rebel troops that had sought to come in and join the Gaida forces. The gunboat had ceased fire, and the square and the station were quiet.

Leaning against the main gate of the deserted building Grant caught his breath as he took stock. How soon the Japanese would move he could not be sure, but doubtless it would be shortly. Had his assailants been Japanese? They might well, of course, have been Russians. But he was almost certain that he had seen a Japanese uniform lurking in the shadows of the passageway—ostensibly as a guard for the Lama priests, but actually to spy.

Yes, they would move soon. And what could he, single-handed, do to prevent their taking possession? What would happen if he came in actual conflict with them? After all, the Japanese commanding general was the senior officer of the Allied forces.

THE roar of heavy motors came to his ears from far up one of the main streets opening on the square. The flicker of lights caught his eye. Somewhere up there a motor convoy was on the way. Whose?

An automobile horn honked across the square, and two great headlights flashed out. Grant squared his shoulders as he stepped squarely in front of the open gate, his left hand upraised, his right clamped on his automatic in the open holster.

A long, low, military touring car slid to a stop at the curb and several men in uniform, with clattering sabers, clambered out into the dim light of the one street lamp by the station. Japanese officers!

They moved toward him.

"Gentlemen," snapped Grant, "the railway station is in the hands of United States troops. I am Lieutenant Grant, commanding the station guard!"

A HISS of disappointment and surprise went up. The Japs peered beyond him at the station yard. Grant thanked heaven for the sheltering darkness which covered its emptiness. The rumbling convoy he had first noticed was coming nearer. But out of the tail of his eye he saw the lights of other motor vehicles coming down another converging street. From both thoroughfares came the wail of horns—and one of them was surely the note of an American siren! Pray God he could keep up the bluff for a moment longer.

"General Nakajima commands here, Lieutenant," lisped a Japanese major, in English. "Lemove your tloops at once!"

He made as if to dodge past, and Grant shifted his bulk in front of him.

"Halt where you are!"

The American's automatic carried further assurance that he meant business.

"I take orders from my commanding officer." Grant clipped the words out. "You gentlemen must remove yourselves at once. Take it up with American headquarters!"

The group hesitated, a flood of chatter rising.

The flaring, dancing lights of the converging racing trucks were almost in the square now, their rattling and roaring fairly drowning all conversation. Just another thirty seconds!

"Where are your men?" demanded the Japanese officer in an angry shout.

"My men?" repeated Grant, turning his head as if to look into the empty darkness of the station behind him.

"Yes, your men. Come, sir, stand aside! Let the General through!"

Ten seconds to go!

Five seconds! A pistol flickered in the hand of one of the Japs!

One second! And—

Into the square shot the leading truck of the convoy to the right. Grant's heart leaped as he recognized the radiator of a Liberty Class "B" plunging for the gate, straight as an arrow! From the street to the left, just fifty yards behind, wallowed the leader of the other convoy, to bring up with grinding, smoking brakes as the winner of the race held to his course. The great Liberty loomed over them, Grant and the Japanese officers jumping aside as it roared by and into the station yard, followed by four others, each of them crammed with cheering doughboys! The race was won!

Four men hurled themselves on him, hampering themselves by their very impetuosity.

"My men, did you say, Major?" And Grant smiled grimly as he fairly spat the words out. "My men? My men are here—now!" His hand waved to the American infantrymen swarming over the station grounds. The last truck of the Yank convoy had come to a full stop in the gate, effectually blocking the entrance.

Some one grabbed his arm.

"Thank God you're safe, sir!" said Corporal Mumford.

The pair stood and watched as the Japanese officers held a whispered conference for a moment. Then the Major turned to Grant again.

"General Nakajima is velly glad," said he stiffly, "to see that our American allies have taken up position. He letuns to his headquatels!"

And as they gathered about the touring car, Grant distinctly heard from inside it the high, reedy chuckle of a voice he recognized—of Chu Fang Ling, Abbot of Urga and representative of the Living Buddha.

In response to a shouted order the Japanese lorries with their load of beady-eyed stocky soldiery began backing away. Grant relaxed. He was shaking with nervousness and fatigue now that the strain was over.

He wondered what all this criss-cross menace meant. Now that it was over he felt a certain thrill in having been behind the scenes for a moment. He even wished that perhaps—after he had had a good sleep—he might see something more of the wires whose twitching behind the curtain actuated the puppets of world control. Later on times were to come when he was to wish that he had never had that desire!

CHAPTER III

CR-A-ASH!

The roll of a volley of musketry roused Grant and Mumford from their fitful sleep in Samsonovich's hotel.

"The sons!" cursed the corporal. "Another batch of prisoners gone, I suppose."

Crack! Crack! Crack! Three deliberate pistol shots.

"Cripes, yes," sighed the Lieutenant. "Three of 'em. Can't you just see the guy commanding the firing-squad picking his way over the bodies and popping lead into any that're still squirming!"

Grant threw himself back on his bed, but the sleep had gone from him. Three weeks of Chita—three weeks of watching the workings of Seminoff, had stretched his nerves almost to the snapping-point. He felt for his cigarettes and lit one, puffing away in the dark, his reflective gaze fixed on the gleaming red of the tip.

HIS active brain once more went over the details of their hectic adventure, while Mumford's deep breathing turned into gentle snores. Corporal "Slim" Mumford had the true soldier's viewpoint. So long as he had his officer to do the worrying Slim could cast trouble out of his mind and sleep peacefully. Throw the weight of responsibility on his shoulders and Slim would come through. But just at present the responsibility was not his—it was his officer's. Let him sit up and worry, soldier.

Grant had cause for worry. The horrible stew that was Siberia at that time was boiling over. The fat was bubbling into the fire. Up to the westward the Soviets had taken Irkutsk. The bullets of the Red firing squad that had torn the life from Admiral Kolchack had ended the organized White Russian resistance. At Verkhe-Udinsk the American 27th Infantry, about three thousand strong, was anxiously waiting transportation back to Vladivostok. Seminoff was proclaiming himself dictator of Siberia, but holding only the great "Y" of the railways and the district about Chita itself. And to the east Blagoveschensk had gone Red, cutting off Chita from Vladivostok. The one remaining link with the coast was the Chinese Eastern Railway, guarded by the Japs and running through Manchuria, via Harbin, to "Vlad." The precarious edifice built by the Allies and the Czechs upon the sands of White Russian foundation was toppling.

And Grant's work was not done. Blissfully vague in details yet grippingly definite in objective they had been. As an observer with Seminoff's forces he was "to find out definitely Seminoff's relations with the Japanese, the Japanese projects with regard to uniting Asia, and reëstablish contact with the individuals with whom Partridge was working." Partridge—that was the name of the man shot down in the street the night he had rescued the Lama's messenger—the State Department agent who had given his life.

And what had Grant accomplished? Seminoff's relations with the Japanese were, of course, public property. He was owned by them, body and soul. His troops—a sad conglomeration of the gallant men of the old Russian army, actuated by motives of patriotism and revenge; and robbers and plunderers making the most of their opportunity—did what Japan wanted. A Japanese mission governed Seminoff.

Japan's plans for uniting Asia, for working that great inchoate mass over into a living yellow empire—those plans, if they existed, Grant had not been able to unfold. Only the words of the Abbot of Urga bore witness to that. To find out anything more would necessitate getting to Urga.

So far he had not been able to get to Urga. Seminoff had smilingly but definitely declined him permission to strike southward to the Mongolian border. In addition, he knew that that border was guarded by Chinese troops. Only that morning he had filed a telegram to American headquarters at Vladivostok, via Harbin, announcing that unless he received instructions to the contrary he would cut loose and make an attempt on his own to push through the passes into Mongolia. . . .

Grant finally drifted off to sleep, to be aroused with a jump by a thunderous banging on the door. It was morning. Half-dressed, he went to the door and opened it, Mumford craning his head behind him. A Cossack under-officer with a file of men behind him barged into the room.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the enraged Grant.

His Russian was not so feeble but that he could understand the man's startling announcement that they were prisoners and would come at once to Seminoff's headquarters. Resistance, of course, was useless. The officer with some difficulty persuaded the Cossack to give them time to dress. Their weapons were appropriated. Fif-

teen minutes found them tramping up the steps of the White headquarters.

BY this time Grant was bubbling over with rage. With all his high-handed ways—including the now memorable attack by his armored train on the American detachment at Posolskaya—Seminoff himself had always been fairly courteous to the Americans and had disclaimed with profuse apologies having ever actually ordered any move against his supposed allies.

Seated at a desk in the big room of headquarters was a brutal-faced officer whom Grant did not recognize. But behind him stood another man—the Japanese major whom Grant had bluffed at the railway station in Vladivostok!

"I demand, sir, the meaning of this—the arrest of an American officer on duty!" he snapped.

"The public safety demands it," drawled the Russian.

He waved a bundle of papers in Grant's face. Telegraph flimsies—Grant recognized them as copies of various code messages he had sent and received while in Chita.

"You are accused of sending subversive messages to your headquarters," continued his inquisitor. "You will immediately translate these code messages."

"I refuse!" Grant replied hotly. "I demand to see Ataman Seminoff at once!"

"Ataman Seminoff has more important business," said the Russian, with a cold smile. "I am Colonel Alexieff, temporarily in command of the city. Major Yarona, who is in charge of the Japanese mission and the telegraph makes this accusation."

"But—but he has nothing to do with me," responded Grant. "I am an American officer here as an observer. This Japanese officer here can testify to that; he has met me before, in Vladivostok."

The Japanese smiled blandly.

"I have never seen you before," he retorted, insolently blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke through his nostrils.

"Why, you're the man who tried to make me turn over the Vladivostok railway station!" Furious, Grant made a mistake. "I kept you there talking until our men came up," he taunted.

"If anyone did interfere with his Imperial Japanese Majesty's troops," said the Nipponese, "he would live to regret it." He turned to the Russian. "I do not know this man, Colonel. Personally, I would think him an impostor."

Double-crossed!

"I demand the right to wire General Graves at Vladivostok or Colonel Morrison at Verkhe-Udinsk!" roared Grant. "There are other Allied officers here who know me," he continued. "Let me see them."

"Japan controls the telegraph over the Chinese Eastern Railway lines. I refuse to grant any such demand." Yarona's tone was cold and decisive.

"And I," chimed in the Russian, "am tired of arguing. Will you translate those messages?"

"No, damn your soul!"

AT the click of Alexieff's hand the guards, jumping forward, had both Americans pinioned before they could move.

"Into the cells with them," he ordered curtly.

Downstairs into the evil-smelling dungeons of the Ogre of Chita their captors hurried them, downstairs into a half twilight, to an odor of death and decay. An iron door clanged behind them and Grant and Slim faced each other, trapped.

"A nice kettle of fish!" the officer declared. "We're in for trouble, Corporal. I'm sorry," he added, "that I've dragged you into this."

"Don't worry about me, Lieutenant. I can stand it if you can."

Grant paced up and down the narrow room like a madman. The thing had come so suddenly that he did not know just what to do. He cursed himself for not keeping a weather-eye lifted. That Jap must have been around for several days. But why should he suddenly clamp down? Surely if this were a personal matter—if he wanted revenge for being outwitted that night at the railway—he would take other steps.

And what had happened in Vladivostok? Could it be that orders had been sent him from there—orders which had been held up by the Japanese authorities? Would this Russian—the Jap, too, for that matter—have been so bold if they were not in possession of news Grant had not received?

But—what if there were some movement on foot to cut off the 27th Infantry at Verkhe-Udinsk from Vladivostok? What if Seminoff and the Japanese, acting in concert, should garner all possible rolling stock, immobilizing the Americans, nearly two thousand miles from their base? There came to his mind the impression that the yards at Chita contained many more railway cars than when he first arrived.

GRANT gathered his wits. This must be studied out carefully. In the first place, there must be other American officers in Chita. But were there? No, by gravy! He and the corporal had just checked up the day before. At that moment there were no other Americans in Chita but themselves. Wow!

The startling fact began to seep into his mind that he and the corporal were in real peril. He had seen too many persons facing firing squads and worse—from both Reds and Whites, not to realize that it would be quite in keeping with this topsy-turvy land of bloody terror for him and Mumford to meet the same fate—if the protection and prestige of their identity as American soldiers were taken away from them. And what about the danger to the regiment at Verkhe-Udinsk?

His thoughts were interrupted by a roar from Slim. He turned abruptly to see the corporal standing at the iron barred door of their cell.

"What's the matter now?"

"I was thinking, Lieutenant, could we get some of these birds to rustle us some chow we might be able to look this thing over more calm-like."

"Go to it—see if you can rouse anyone."

Another stentorian roar from Mumford brought response. A clatter of hob-nailed boots outside, and a shrill-pitched Mongolian voice calling in to them. In the dim light Grant saw that a soldier-guard, a Buriat apparently, was standing outside. In answer to Slim's pidgin-English and broken Russian the man stretched in a grimy paw with a grunt of acquiescence, rubbing thumb and finger together in the world-wide gesture for money.

Grant pushed the corporal aside and pulled out a handful of change.

"Hold a match here, Corporal," ordered Grant. Mumford struck a light and held it while the officer fumbled over the change. The first piece he struck was not money at all—it was the broken token with the angry god-face. The guard saw it as soon as he did. With a squeal he pulled himself together at attention and his hand went, palm out, to his forehead.

"Noyon! Noyon!" he murmured with respect. "Excellency!"

HOPE leaped in Grant's heart. This was a break of unexpected luck. He had forgotten all about the token for two reasons. The first one was that he had been saving a flash of the coin for such time as he might be in the bailiwick of the Abbot of Urga; the second was that he had been afraid that any premature showing to the Buriats or other Mongols about Chita might have brought about unwelcome publicity as to his intentions.

He pressed a handful of silver in the man's hand, and explained that they wanted something to eat.

"Da, da, noyon!" agreed the guard and scuttled away, to return shortly with a steaming pot of tea and some oatcakes. The man's manner was most servile.

The pair munched their cakes and washed them down with alternate pulls at the one cup that accompanied the tea-pot. That done they lit up—they still had cigarettes in their pockets—and faced one another.

In low tones Grant told the corporal his fears concerning the 27th Infantry.

"Of course we don't know just what is happening," he concluded, "but the way things are shaping up, Mumford, our best bet will be to get to Verkhe-Udinsk and warn them."

"Yes, sir," agreed the corporal. "There's just one loose link in the plan, though."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, seems to me we've got to get out of this joint, first."

Grant grinned rather sheepishly.

"I'll admit that part. But what I want to drive home, Corporal, is that getting to Verkhe-Udinsk and the 27th Infantry with word of what seems to be brewing here is paramount. And we've got to be cold-blooded about it. If we can make it together, so much the better. But one of us must do it. If anything happens, there must be no holding up on the part of either, with the idea of helping the other. The man who goes down will be out of luck. Get me?"

"Yes, sir. 'Three Musketeers' stuff—the ride for the *Queen's* diamonds."

"Exactly. But remember, too, that there is no chivalry in this country. It's kill or be killed. But I don't have to tell you that."

"Noyon!"

A low-pitched whisper from the door. Wheeling, the pair saw their Mongol guard beckoning to them. The man appeared to be excited. They approached the door. He at once poured out a long palaver most of which they could not understand. His gestures, however, left no room for doubt.

His forefinger swept across his throat. He patted his holster, then raising his hand again, pointed forefinger jutting from clenched fist, pressed the finger against his temple. They were to be executed, that was plain. And it would seem, soon.

Cold shivers ran down Grant's spine. A soldier's death, in the open, may be contemplated without too much apprehension. But to be shot down like a dog, or have one's throat slit like a bullock, in a dank cellar, without a chance for one's white alley—that is not so nice. He pulled himself together. Digging the broken coin out of his pocket he held it up before the Mongol's face.

"*Khutukhtu,*" he announced. "*Cheptsung Tampa Khutukhtu*—the living Buddha!"

Once more the Mongol, a Buriat tribesman by his appearance, cringed.

"Looks like you have the high sign on that boy, Lieutenant," whispered the irrepressible Mumford.

GRANT nodded. The guard disappeared. In a few moments he was back again. Deftly he pushed something through the bars. Grant, grabbing it, found a pistol in his hands. Swiftly he jammed it in his blouse, with bounding heart. Again the guard repeated the performance, and the second time he disappeared down the corridor both Americans were armed. Cautiously they examined their weapons. Both had loaded magazines.

"Tuck 'em away," cautioned Grant, suiting action to words, while the corporal followed his example. "Thank God we can do something now. Let's put our heads together and make up a plan of action."

"It looks to me," he continued, "as if we would be visited by the 'Ogre's' butcher boys sometime tonight. How many will be in the party I don't know. But—there's one thing, sure—they wont be expecting us to put up a fight—at least not an armed resistance. And the sounds of shooting wont mean anything out of the way for the people in the neighborhood. The merry souls in the guardroom will consider that it's just the usual routine butcher work.

"If we start shooting as soon as any newcomers march in, we'll have about a minute to cut our way out. And the way our Mongol friend out there seems to feel about our token—I imagine that there wont be any hot pursuit on the part of any of the Mongol soldiers. All we've got to do is get the jump on the visiting firemen."

"That's all," agreed the pessimistic Mumford. "Just shoot our way out of here, out of town, and out of the district; through about ten thousand Whites and two thousand Japs."

But Grant refused to be discomfited.

"At any rate, it's better than standing up to be shot without a chance. If we go out, we'll go fighting."

FOR the rest of that age-long day nothing happened. Some food was brought at noon, by another guard — a Russian, this one. The dim light of the cell turned to dusk when the winter sun set. The waiting seemed endless. It got on their nerves a bit, and they had reached the fidgety stage when a flicker of light in the corridor and the tramp of feet betokened something about to happen.

Fifty times since they received the arms the Americans had rehearsed their parts. Grant was to stand in the middle of the cell. Mumford, behind the inward swinging door, was to be waiting with drawn gun. He would shoot down that intruder who penetrated farthest toward Grant, also any others he could get before they turned on him. As they did Grant was to go into action. They figured that by getting the jump they could account for at least four men. That more than that number would come into the cell, they did not believe. Further than that they did not plan, except that once the way to the door was clear both would try for it, try for the open —shooting as they went. Of course it was sheer madness—looking at it from the common-sense point of view. But both men knew that bold men had attempted madder deeds, and won out.

The rest of it would lie in the laps of the gods. The post road—the old road that ran through the mountains far to the north of the railway, from Chita to Verkhe-Udinsk, was their objective. To attempt the railway would be to put themselves at once into Japanese hands. The post road, and two hundred and fifty miles of winter traveling—each man for himself when they reached the open if necessary, and the hope that they might find one another.

The lock of the door rattled, clicked, and the portal swung slowly inward, hiding the corporal from Grant's view as he himself stood in the center of the room, facing the entrance. A lantern showed a group of men outside—Cossack uniforms —glitter of arms—a vague picture that

danced before Grant's eyes in his excitement. His right hand in his pocket squeezed the grip of his pistol.

"Outside, prisoners!" shouted a gruff voice. So that was it—they were to step out into the hands of their guards! This eventuality, too, they had discussed. Grant was to lead, starting shooting as he stepped over the door, Mumford to cover him, so that they would face the passage in both directions.

GRANT started out—his vision clearing as he approached the doorway. Five men he could see there—an officer of some sort and four soldiers. The officer was armed and had a pistol in his hand, hanging by his side. Of the soldiers three had rifles, the fourth bore a lantern. If there were more men in the corridor he could not see them. Not until he stepped over the threshold could he determine that—and by that time he would have commenced firing.

The officer's face was familiar to the lieutenant. The last time he had seen the man he had been superintending the whipping of a peasant, on the outskirts of the city—a peasant whose crime consisted in protesting against the looting of his home by the Cossacks. The squashy thud of the bamboo rods on the poor devil's swollen, distorted feet—mere blobs of purple flesh—had rung in Grant's ears for days. So much the better, now—he had no qualms of conscience in shooting this man nor his soldiers, either. His automatic spat its streak of yellow flame through his pocket as his foot touched the threshold.

Wham!

The Cossack officer, the soldier with the lantern, and one of the other trio, slumped together. Grant, diving over their bodies, his gun out now, felt the kicking sear and shock of Mumford's pistol over his right shoulder.

Wham! And again, *wham!*

The lantern on the floor flickered for an instant, then went out. And in the darkness of the corridor Grant and Mumford stood in the midst of five dead or dying foes; stood for an instant, to decide which way to run. The right, they knew, led into the office where they had been arraigned. What did the left lead to? It was from that direction that this party had come.

FROM the right came a shouting—a whistle—confused noises. The shooting had not passed without notice, then! Their way was decided for them. They must take the left and chance it. They started down into the darkness, at a jog-trot.

For fully fifty feet they ran, then a dim light showed a turn in the passage. Pistols at the ready, prepared to blaze their way through whatever opposition they might find, the pair swung around the corner.

Somewhere ahead of them a light was burning. Beside them and to their left a door, partly open, gaped. A hand clutched Slim's arm. The corporal, swinging his gun, was about to fire when his lieutenant's grip stopped him at the same time that the now familiar tones of their Mongol friend came to their ears.

"Noyon! In here—"

Crowding on the heels of their guide, they dived through. The door clicked shut behind them, leaving them in utter darkness. The Mongol's hand gripped Grant's, leading him on. He, in turn, grabbed at the corporal's, dragging him after. Half stumbling on the unfamiliar ground, they hurried through another entrance, down a step, then turning again, up a winding staircase, at the top of which the Mongol halted. He fumbled at something, then with click of a latch a breath of cold air hit them in the face, and the twinkle of stars, dancing in the icy night, caught their staring eyes.

Breathing deep of the blessed cold air of freedom, they tumbled out. Where they were of course Grant did not know. But it must be on some side street running off the Bolshoy Prospekt. No lights, of course. But something dark moved in front of them, a deeper blot against the night. And a voice spoke in plain English:

"Follow me, please."

IT was a familiar voice. Where had he heard it? Grant wondered, even as he obeyed. This break was too good to lose. Of course it had to do with his token. Ah! That was it—the voice of the man walking swiftly ahead of them was the voice of the man he had rescued in Vladivostok — the Mongol emissary who had accompanied Partridge, the murdered State Department agent. The corporal nudged him.

"That's the guy we got out of the house that night," he whispered.

The man ahead turned into a doorway. They followed blindly, into a hall, through another door, past a hidden guard, who exchanged a guttural password with their conductor. Then a match flamed, the wick of

an oil-light blossomed, flickering, to cast its comforting warmth over a small room.

Before them stood their former acquaintance, bundled in his long quilted Buriat coat and fur hat. His extended hands grasped theirs.

"Welcome," were his simple words. "I am happy to repay in some small way my great debt to you." His next words were unexpected. "I have been expecting you for some time."

"You mean—that is—you knew we were here in Chita?" asked Grant.

"I knew you were coming. I knew that danger would encompass you. I came here from Urga to help you, hurrying that I might arrive in time."

"Then there is still some link between Vladivostok and Urga? I thought that Partridge was the only direct link. They said nothing about that to me."

Grant knew, of course, that this man must have known who Partridge was and what sort of work he had been doing. But he was puzzled at the indication that some one in Vladivostok must have direct communication with Urga. If that were so, why should he have been sent up here?

His host smiled.

"A link, yes," he agreed. "But not in the form that you mean. Some day, perhaps, when we have time, it may be revealed to you."

He waved his hand, as if to indicate that further questioning would be futile. He called and another man sprang into the room. A few quick orders and the second man went bustling about, producing tea, vodka, and meat with a rather startling suddenness—Grant felt that he seemed to be producing food as a magician brings rabbits out of a hat.

"You will immediately translate these code messages!"

AT the invitation they drew up and ate their fill. Both men were ravenous, they realized. And as they ate Grant studied the man who sat opposite them. Clean-shaven, hair cropped short, features more Tartar-like than Mongolian, black eyes, piercing in their direct gaze. A strong face, that, and the features of a man of brains. Who was this person who flitted about and spoke of mysterious messages, who bridged with seeming ease thousands of miles of perilous travel? His quilted overgarment had been flung open in the

warm room. Leaning now with elbows on the table, the dropped sleeves of his clothes showed a twist of beads about one wrist—beads of some rich brown wood, carved intricately. And there was a flash of yellow silk beneath the coat. Was this man a Buddhist priest—a fighting Lama?

And what a religious *liaison* there must be amongst all these Mongol and semi-Mongol races! Grant had not given much thought to the ramifications of Lamaism until he had seen the mysterious token do its stuff with his guard. He had heard fantastic tales, to be sure. But nothing definite. Even in the ranks of the White Russians this mysterious brotherhood existed, it seemed. He took it for granted that it was religious, of course.

How far could he take this strange individual into his confidence? What connection did he have with Partridge? Were the Japanese actually the enemies of this Mongol partisanship? Was there some other undercurrent working with them, some adversaries of the living Buddha of Urga? And how could he work out all this mystery to good account in his own mission?

SLIM MUMFORD'S sigh of content as the corporal leaned back in his chair and lit a cigarette brought him from his revery. At the same time the Mongol spoke:

"How do you propose getting to Verkhe-Udinsk?"

The question came so quickly on the heels of his own thoughts that Grant was flabbergasted. How did this man know that he intended going to Verkhe-Udinsk? He sat goggle-eyed for an instant. Then his interlocutor continued:

"Perhaps I had better put it this way—how do you propose enlisting my aid in your dash for Verkhe-Udinsk?"

It was startling—very startling. Was this mysterious person a mind-reader? But second thought came to Grant's assistance. This man was nobody's fool. The common-sense thing to do under the circumstances would be to make for the nearest American troops—and Verkhe-Udinsk of course was the nearest American garrison.

"Frankly," said Grant, "by placing myself in your hands."

The other nodded. He glanced at the corporal, who was listening closely.

"I see," he addressed Slim, "that you, also, are wondering how I know that you two intended going to Verkhe-Udinsk. You are also wondering if I am a priest of your Christian faith, because of the beads you see on my wrist. Your officer, now, never had that thought."

"Cripes!" gasped Slim.

The Mongol smiled.

"Come," said he, to Grant. "We have interests that are to a certain degree mutual. Let us discuss them."

"Gladly. But in the meantime, what about our safety? Surely there will be a terrific to-do about our breaking out. If we don't make a get-away in jig-time, we're going to be bagged. And you—wont you be getting yourself in serious trouble, hiding us?"

"Do not trouble yourself about that. We are safe."

THE man's confident tones puzzled Grant. He could not reconcile them with their first meeting. If this mysterious personage could surround himself so surely here, why was he not able to protect both the unfortunate Partridge and himself in Vladivostok? Again the Mongol seemed to read his mind with ease.

"In Vladivostok," he announced, in simple tones, "far different influences were at work. Be at rest." Then he continued:

"The Red armies are sweeping resistlessly on. With the Czecho-Slovak forces withdrawn from the front this Seminoff régime will shortly collapse, despite Japanese influence. In the meantime Red agents are active here. Your troops at Verkhe-Udinsk are in peril, for the Reds will overwhelm them, and their only way of retreat is in Japanese control. How simple it would be for General Otani to prevent, through Seminoff, any troop-trains coming to them from Chita!

"Do you know what would happen then? Your troops would be forced to fight their way on foot through the passes into Mongolia, through Urga, and thence down the caravan trail over the desert of Gobi, into China, with Peking their objective. Their presence in Mongolia would be to our wild tribes the waving of a red flag in the face of a bull. The Soviets would gain the confidence of Mongolia; every man's hand would be against your men. How many would win their way through?"

Knowing the 27th Infantry Grant felt that that outfit could make it. But at what sacrifice!

"There is a Chinese army now at Urga," the Mongol continued. "Doubtless the Chinese would side against your troops. It

would be Yellow against White. It would furnish Japan with a lever in her plans to gain domination over all Asia."

"What is your interest in all this?" demanded Grant.

"My interest is the freeing of the living Buddha at Urga from the imprisonment he is now undergoing at the hands of the Chinese, and the liberation of outer Mongolia from any outside domination."

"All right," replied Grant. "My interest is in clearing the way for the 27th Infantry to get out of Verkhe-Udinsk. Along certain lines our interests seem to run parallel. Let's put our cards frankly on the table."

"Good!" The mysterious man nodded. "There is only one way to get sufficient trains to your troops. They must be ordered up from Chita." He paused, then lowering his voice, asked another question.

"Have you by chance ever heard of Baron Ungern von Sternberg?"

"Sure. Everyone in Chita knows him—the 'mad Baron,' Seminoff's second in command; crazy as a bedbug, they say. Gets his pleasure swilling vodka and seeing how many new ways of torturing Bolshevists he can think up."

The other grunted.

"All true. But—he is also a loyal Russian, and more than that, he is a Buddhist. He has dipped for many years into Lama mysticism, and there is no more faithful follower of the living Buddha of Urga. Even now he is working on a plan to rescue the living Buddha. And, were he in command here, he would send all the trains he could get to Verkhe-Udinsk—give every bit of help possible to your people—if he thought it was the wish of Him who rules in Urga. He is a Brother of Ta Kure."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The Brethren of Ta Kure are members of a society sworn to deliver the living Buddha from bondage—a society of Lamas and pious laymen, whose token is that coin you have. Ta Kure is the Mongol name of Urga."

GRANT whistled. He was beginning to have some grasp of what all this mysterious business was about. And a seed of another sort had been planted in his mind—had been planted and was blossoming into maturity with every tick of the clock.

"Tell me—" and he almost whispered the words—"tell me; how many of the Brethren of Ta Kure could you rally here in an emergency; how many men who would work absolutely blindly to accomplish a purpose sanctioned by the living Buddha? Could you get fifty fighting men?"

"As many as you want."

"Then," declared Grant, and his voice rang like a trumpet, "you and I are going to get down to brass tacks, brother, here and now!"

CHAPTER IV

"COLONEL, I have seen better men than you impaled for less costly bungles than that!"

The words, hissed with an icy emphasis, fell like a knell on the cringing ears of Colonel Dimitry Alexieff, acting commandant of Chita. When Seminoff, Ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks, dictator of Chita, and self-styled ruler of Siberia, spoke in such tones, some one was sure to suffer.

The twenty-eight-year-old "Ogre of Chita" paced up and down in front of his desk, lashing himself into a deadly rage. The silver tabs of his aiguillettes clashed against the golden cartridges that peeped from their loops on the breast of his blue Cossack tunic as he swung about.

Frankly on the pay-roll of Nippon, and hating Americans, Seminoff was also afraid of those same hard-shooting men from across the sea, who had called his bluff every time that he had attempted to put something over.

He remembered Ryan's ordnance train—the train that he had held up in his own railway yards only to have that young lieutenant bluff him out with an invitation to take the train if he could, while the handful of American machine-gunners crouched grimly by the track. He remembered his telegraphic message of apology sent at that time in answer to the American commander's demand that the train be instantly released: —*"Dear Colonel, we understand each other, I see. Don't worry, I shake your hand."*

He remembered what happened to his armored train, the "Destroyer," when it sneaked alongside Kendall's box-cars at Posolskaya in the treacherous midnight attack, which ended by that little group of Yankee soldiers swarming out like wrathful hornets in the face of the cannon, the machine-guns, and the hand-grenades of General Bogomolitz's train crew—and capturing it.

Each time that he had made some open

move against the Americans, his supposed Allies, he had been spanked. And now two desperate Americans, locked up to be spirited out of the way, had by the bungling of Alexieff obtained pistols and shot their way out of his stronghold. That would mean more trouble, more apologies, more loss of face—and, incidentally, the wrath of his paymasters, who had their own ideas of what should happen to Americans. It might mean the collapse of their present plans. It might mean trouble with the other Americans—those ingenuous relief persons who so willingly sent free trainloads of supplies for starving Russians into his hands, to be turned over at a pretty profit for himself.

"There is no trace of these men?"

"No—that is—not so far, General."

"See here." Seminoff's voice was quivering with rage. "You will find those men and bring me proof of your find within twenty-four hours. Otherwise, I assure you, I shall have you flayed alive. Go!"

The last word he roared, and Alexieff fled. Seminoff turned to his desk, beside which was sitting another individual clad in a Russian cavalry uniform, hunched cross-legged in his chair, nervously puffing at a cigarette. A long rust-colored straggly mustache only partly concealed a wide mouth with thin, straight lips—the mouth of a man who could be cruel for the fun of it, perhaps. His deep-sunk eyes peered out from under bushy brows. The tanned skin, the wind-wrinkles about the eyes, told of an active outdoor life. But the eyes, like holes burned in a blanket, told their own story of fanaticism, mysticism and dissipation. Those eyes gleamed beneath a bulgy, protruding forehead on which the tight-drawn skin glistened. A shock of unkempt brown hair, not so reddish as the mustache, topped it off.

Just now the mouth was parted in a quizzical smile, as this singular appearing person stared at the baffled Ataman. The small head was cocked to one side on the rather wide shoulders, on which the tarnished lace-covered shoulder-straps of a general officer perched.

"I hope you are amused, Baron," snarled the Cossack.

"Somewhat, my dear General," answered the other in a high-pitched nervous voice. "Really, I don't know which amuses me more—the thought of how Alexieff would look while he was being parboiled, preparatory to the flaying, or your own embarrassment should you have to apologize once again to our American allies."

"Blast your soul, Von Sternberg! One of these days you will go just a bit too far and I will give you a taste of torture!"

Ungern von Sternberg lit a fresh cigarette from the old one, flicked the butt away and blew a long cloud of smoke.

"My time will come, Seminoff," he replied. "But you will not be the man to do it. You do not dare. Do you know, if it were not that I still hug the hope that Russia can be saved from the Red terror, I would put myself at the head of my riders, dash over the Mongolian border and leave you to your own resources?"

He stretched lazily.

"I may do it anyway," he continued. "If you fail, that is my intention. I will join the Mongols, rescue the living Buddha from the Chinese who hold him in Urga, and make war on everything that is Red. It will be a merry life, if a short one."

Seminoff stood gazing at him.

"I believe," he said, "that you are the only man in Siberia who does not fear me."

"I have yet to see the man, woman, or horse whom I do fear," shrugged Von Sternberg. "But what is the use of our quarrelling? I am your second in command, and we lead what is perhaps the last hope of Russia. I do not agree with your methods, but so long as you represent White Russia, I am your man."

The Cossack leader spoke again.

"I am going away for a day or so," he remarked abruptly. "I do not wish to be disturbed. Carry on in my place. And if this animal Alexieff has not accomplished my orders by this time tomorrow—" He ended his remarks with an expressive shrug.

"I understand," said Von Sternberg. "The *tashur*—the bamboo rod—will do its work. Sepailoff will superintend. Such things give him pleasure."

SEMINOFF strode from the room. At the door of his headquarters stood a waiting droshky, the driver or *izvostchek*, bundled up in his voluminous greatcoat, an armed orderly beside him. A lounging detachment of Cossacks standing by their rugged little ponies near the sled straightened up as their commander came out. He stepped in, the orderly wrapped him with rugs, the escort mounted, and the cortège went dashing down the street at a gallop.

Through the city streets and out into the open country to the south of the Aksha

road Seminoff's conveyance and its escort traveled, putting the versts behind them in the pale light of the winter late afternoon sun, for an hour.

The road they traveled was almost deserted. Finally, when the clustered houses of a tiny village began to show themselves in the distance, a little group of horsemen, traveling in the same direction, loomed ahead. A Buriat group, evidently, several men huddled on dejected ponies, in their midst a covered sledge from which fluttered a tattered red and yellow pennon.

The Cossack officer commanding the detachment shouted a question at the Buriats, who answered listlessly, then huddled to one side of the road.

"Smallpox, Ataman," explained the officer to Seminoff. "Some members of a wandering tribe. They are taking their sick chieftain to the Lamasery in the Yablon, to make some incantation."

"Keep clear," responded Seminoff, shuddering. "Keep clear, and pass wide."

They rushed by, giving the tatterdemalion crew a wide berth and coming a short distance farther into the village. Behind it, in a valley, nestled a large farmhouse, protected by a high *hushun,* or stockade, capable of defense. A galloper, riding ahead of the escort, pounded on the great gate with the butt of his lance, and the iron-studded doors swung open, to close again behind the droshky.

The escort, wheeling, turned back to the village, as if this trip was one with which they were familiar; and dismounting, quartered themselves among the cluster of weather-beaten houses.

The winter dusk settled down on the country-side. Here and there lights twinkled in the houses, and from them faintly began to rise chanting songs of the steppes.

AT the open door of the big farm-house, when Seminoff's droshky halted, stood an old Buriat, who bowed low as the Cossack leader strode from his conveyance.

"Welcome, O Ataman!" the old man called. "Welcome to this *yurta!*"

Nodding easily, Seminoff stepped inside, his droshky moving off into the shelter of the near-by stable. The old man, mumbling to himself, followed, securing the door. The Cossack crossed the hall and stepped into a large room, where a rousing fire roared in the porcelain stove, and an appetizing steam rose from the samovar in the corner. It was almost dark and Seminoff, his eyes partly blinded by the glare of the snow outside, blinked for a moment as he gazed around.

"Masha!" he called. "Where are you, my *dushka*—my darling?"

He turned his head at a slight sound behind him. As he did the muffling folds of a blanket enveloped him and he went down in a rush of men who seemed to spring from all sides. Half-smothered, tied like a mummy in the blanket, the Ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks found himself being lifted in the arms of his captors, —who had not spoken a word during the entire proceeding,—and carried out.

Had there been anyone observing the farm-house at this time they would have seen a blanketed form carried to the entrance of the stockade by a handful of Mongols, who laid their burden down and opening a crack of the gate peered through as if awaiting some one. Behind them another Mongol brought from the stable several ponies. But there was no observer. The droshky driver and the orderly lay bound and gagged in a pile of hay in a corner of the stable.

One of the Cossacks in the village, coming to the door of a cottage and peering down the road, saw the Buriat group with the sick man's sledge in their midst, plodding up toward him. It halted for a moment at the entrance to the farm stockade, then started on again.

The Cossack wondered vaguely as it came abreast of him on the fact that there seemed to be a few more men than there had been when they were overtaken on the road below. He crouched back in the doorway as the sad contingent passed, and slammed the portal in their faces. Smallpox is no small matter in the Trans-Baikal.

The bedraggled Buriats moved on at their snails pace until a bend in the road hid them from the sight of the village. Then some one snarled a command and the detachment, straightening up in their saddles, took up the gallop, the sledge horses urged on to keep the pace by the long whip in the hands of the driver. Coming to a side trail, they swerved off the post road and were soon lost to view in the timbered ridges.

CHAPTER V

BARON VON STERNBERG, muffled in his fur-lined, gray field overcoat, with gray fur cuffs, without insignia of rank—

the regulation winter campaign overcoat of the old Imperial Russian army — moved briskly down a narrow side street in Chita. Behind him, two paces to the rear, two Cossack orderlies stalked in the night. He halted in front of a darkened house, with a low order to the men to wait, and knocking gently, slipped through the quickly opened door, the glow of bright lights from within winking out for an instant and as quickly blotted with its closing.

Two crop-haired Lamas bowed low to the Baron as he stripped off his outer coat,

which he tossed to them. In the hallway on an ebony table stood a bronze bell, beside another door. Picking up the metal striker laying beside it, the Baron struck the bell once, firmly.

The melodious boom of the bell reverberated in the narrow space and the inner door swung open. Entering reverently, the Russian officer's deep-sunk eyes, burning with the fire of a mystic, fell on a yellow silk curtain inscribed with Tibetan inscriptions, hanging in the middle of the room. Beside the curtain flickered small lamps throwing fantastic shadows. A prayer wheel stood to one side.

A Lama standing silent by the curtain drew its folds to one side and the dim outlines of a gilded statue of Buddha, seated in the golden lotus, loomed.

Ungern von Sternberg prostrated himself before the image, then rising to his knees, struck his forehead to the ground. After an instant's pause he slowly got to his feet, holding out his cupped hands. The Lama proffered a silver ewer, pouring holy water into the Russian's palms. Von Sternberg dashed the liquid against his forehead and stood as if waiting a call.

A thin but calm voice rose from the shadows behind the statue.

"Who calls Great Buddha?"

"An humble suppliant, seeking the Light of Asia."

"Enter, *Chiang Chun,* Great General."

Passing behind the statue the Baron found himself facing an old man with benevolent features, clad in the brick-red silk robes of a Lamist abbot, his high yellow cap on his head. Seated at a table, beside a glowing brazier, with the shoulder bones of a sheep in a basket beside him—the paraphernalia for prophecy — the Abbot of Urga cast his kindly eyes on Ungern.

"What seek you, my son?"

"Great Abbot, *Kanpo-Gelong,* again I search a revelation of the future."

The abbot picked up one of the shoulder bones from the basket and poked it into the red coals of the brazier, murmuring a prayer. Slowly the bone blackened under the fire. Drawing it out, the abbot carefully examined it, and returned it to the flames.

"I see many things, my son," he murmured solemnly. "I see you, the successor of Genghis Khan, at the head of your horsemen, driving away the enemies who have imprisoned our *Khutukhtu,* the living Buddha. I see you surrounded by false counselors—sons of Nippon—who would embroil the great nation of the western world in this our whirlpool of death."

Again he took out the bone and scrutinized it.

"Beware of that, my son," he went on. "This mad dance of death will envelop Siberia with a living torrent of Red! The Soviets cannot be beaten back. For the moment they will win. You—you will come to Mongolia—to Urga. But before that time you must see to it that the westerners from beyond the sea get free passage through Trans-Baikal to their ships. For the present, the responsibility is yours. Get them from Asia, then betake yourself to Urga. I have spoken."

The tired voice ceased.

With one hand Slim dragged the Cossack free as Grant, lying behind his dead horse, cracked down on the leading assailants.

Ungern, shivering, asked another question. "And I, O holy one? What see you for me?"

The abbot's long pale hand rose, barring further interrogation.

"Death rides the wind, my son. Go, do what you must do, and to you will come reincarnation!"

The perspiration started out on the bulging brow of Ungern. Shaking himself as if to rid his mind of dread, he turned and fairly fled from the room. In the hall he flung his coat about him and rushed into the night.

In a few minutes he was at headquarters. At his frenzied call a staff officer hurried to him.

"General Seminoff?" he demanded.

"The Ataman has not returned, Baron," was the answer.

VON STERNBERG almost shrieked. He grasped his head with his hands.

"Woe! Woe! Woe!" he whispered. "He spends his time in debauch when the fate of White Russia hangs on him!" Pacing the room nervously he finally shot a question at the worried staff officer.

"How many trains has the American commander at Verkhe-Udinsk demanded?"

"Twenty trains in all, Baron."

"And how many of them has he received?"

"Five only, sir."

"Are there trains sufficient in the railway yards?"

"Nearly sufficient. But there is other rolling-stock at Manchuli and Nerchinsk which could be requisitioned."

"Good! Get out orders at once to have the full quota of cars and engines proceed to Verkhe-Udinsk. Give orders to clear the way—telegraph the American colonel that he has priority on the railway!"

"But—sir," stammered the officer, "the Japanese mission! They will object—"

"Did you hear me?" stormed the baron. "Or must I open your ears by the *tashur?*"

"Your orders will go out at once, Baron," agreed the nervous man, and hurried out.

THE Ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks awakened from a fitful sleep—the sleep of exhaustion. Trussed hand and foot, he lay in a little cabin, bare and miserable. The morning sun was streaming through a grimy window. Two men, bundled in Mongol quilted garments, stood at a fire, their backs to him. For a moment Seminoff lay quiet, reviewing the events of the past twelve hours.

It had been a hard night for the Ogre of Chita. Choked and muffled in the robes that had enveloped him, he had tossed and bumped in the covered sledge for what seemed an interminable time. Bundled out at last like a sack of meal, he had been partly unwrapped in the dark, only to have the bonds on his limbs tightened again by dimly visible strangers. Laid on a board bed he had tossed and strained vainly until at last sleep had overtaken him.

Who were these kidnapers? Had he fallen into the hands of the Reds? That was most improbable on the face of it, in his own district. But if not Reds, who were these people? Could it be that some of the Mongols, stirred by his bloody rule to rebellion, had taken him off to make away with him? He wondered. Well, it was daylight, now. His courage revived with the day.

"Loose me!"

The indignant demand roared in the confined space. The two men by the fire turned and gazed at him.

ATAMAN SEMINOFF returned their stares with popping eyes.

"Good morning, General," said Grant, in an easy conversational tone. "I hope you slept well."

Seminoff struggled to a sitting position on the bed. But when one has one's legs bound at the ankles, and one's hands tied together in front of one, it is difficult to move without loss of dignity. The Cossack could see the amusement in the eyes of the pair who watched him, and it did not make him feel any better. However, he was nobody's fool, and he determined to trim his sails to the prevailing wind.

"You are the American officer who came up from Vladivostok, are you not?"

"Your memory is very good—at times, General," said Grant.

"I do not understand this at all. Why have you got me trussed up here? And why are you not in your own uniform?"

Grant was feeling good this morning. His desperate plan, cooked up on the spur of the moment, was working like a charm so far. He wagged a playful finger at the Cossack.

"Just a little bit inquisitive, aren't you, General?" he queried.

Seminoff exploded, as the American had thought he would.

"You impertinent cub! Return me immediately to my headquarters, if you value your life!"

"We both value our lives. That is why you are here. And, too, we feel that we ought to be better friends, General. We want you to like us. So you are going to stay with us for quite a while. We'll let you in on the secret when we get ready. In the meantime, perhaps you would like some breakfast."

Seminoff cursed fluently in Russian and flung himself back on the bed. Without paying him any more attention, Grant and the corporal busied themselves about the stove. In a moment they were interrupted by a knock on the door. Grant went to it, while Mumford crossed over to the bed, standing beside the prostrate Cossack leader.

Opening the door a crack, Grant held

conversation with some one outside. Seminoff, lying on the bed, called to the corporal: "How would you like to be rich?"

Slim grunted.

"If you will get your officer out of the way," whispered Seminoff, "I will make you a rich man and give you a commission in my forces."

Grant banged the door shut, fastening it, and, turning towards them, prevented any further conversation. He waved a paper in his hand and Slim hurried over to him.

"From our mysterious Lama man," whispered Grant. "He says that von Sternberg has ordered all the available cars and engines up to Verkhe-Udinsk and given the American troops priority rights on the railway. Wants us to go overland to the railway, towards Manchuli, and meet the troop trains there, holding his nibs with us as a hostage."

"How we going to do it?"

"Ride post through the Mongol tribes. What they call the right of 'urga.' We'll go from one Buriat herd to another, cross country. I've heard of it. It's a special privilege. Apparently the old broken coin works the charm, in our case."

SLIM whistled, and jerked a thumb toward Seminoff.

"How'll we keep him quiet?"

"Muffle him up. The Buriats have no love for him—it's only detachments of his own men we must fear. And if we're cornered, Mumford, I'm going to shoot him, first. The Twenty-seventh must get out."

Grant's jaw jutted like a bit of granite. Slim grinned.

"He's just offered to make it right with me if I toss you off. Guess he thinks—"

"Oh, Lieutenant!"

Seminoff was sitting up again.

"I want to congratulate you on your underofficer. I tested him out by offering him a reward if he would get you out of the way and he refused."

"Yes, I guess you did test him out. Well, General, have you changed your mind about breakfast?"

"I will be glad to get something to eat. Then I am sure we can make some arrangement. You know if I should report to your superiors that you had kidnaped me, your ally, you would suffer severely. What do you want—money? Decorations?"

Grant laughed. The sudden, crafty about-face of the Cossack made no impression on him. They made a strange breakfast on tea and a mutton-stew that a Buriat brought steaming to the door. Seminoff's hands had been loosened so he could eat, but Grant made it plain to him that the slightest attempt to escape would be fatal.

"We are desperate men," said he. "You tried to have us killed. We are free now and don't intend to fall into the hands of you or your subordinates. I'd just as soon shoot you as I would a snake."

And Seminoff was too good a judge of human nature not to know that he meant it.

OVER a snow-covered trail in the foothills surrounding the valley of the Onon River a little cavalcade was riding fast. Two Buriats, the official guides of the party, plunged ahead. Behind them came Mumford, leading the shaggy pony on which rode the muffled figure of Seminoff, disguised by sheepskin coverings over his uniform. Grant brought up the rear.

In front of them in a little valley snuggled a herd of ponies, with the skin and felt *yurtas* of their half-nomad owners clustered about a wooden farm-house; a Buriat tribe, evidently, wintering with some more civilized comrades. The guides, whooping, swept down on the herd, brandishing their *urgas,* long poles with a short species of lasso at the end, and proceeded to cut out, one after another, three fresh ponies.

As the trio in the rear rode up, the new mounts were ready. Dismounting, the riders stretched, while the Mongols shifted saddles. Hoofs spattering softly in the snow, a new group of Buriats rode up—the owners of the herd. The guides chattered loudly; Grant flashed a glimpse of the token with the angry god-head's face, and two new men replaced the former escort. In ten minutes the party was again on the way.

It was an old story now to Grant and Mumford. They had been doing this for four days, working always to the south and east to reach the railway line. All day they rode, at night sleeping in the hospitable but fetid atmosphere of Mongol *yurtas* or the more substantial but equally dirty farm-houses of tribesmen who had settled down to agriculture. And when they slept, Seminoff lay between them, his hands looped one to each of the other men. On the road he had the use of his hands, but Slim led his pony.

HAMPERED by the snow, despite their efforts they could not make more than about thirty miles a day. On several oc-

casions the sight of detachments of troops in the vicinity of the post roads cut their running time again, as they lurked in shelter until their sharp-eyed Mongols declared the coast was clear. And day by day Seminoff grew more sullen.

Keeping constant watch on the Cossack as they did, there was little opportunity for conversation between Grant and the corporal. Slim, as usual, left the worrying up to his officer. Grant kept revolving in his mind the difficulties that beset them. What would happen if they reached the railroad and found that the troop-trains had not started. What if they would be so delayed that they would miss the last train?

The whole affair was so unusual, so mixed up that he did not really know how to make head or tail of it. The only certainty he had was that they had with them the hostage whose detention would surely mean the difference, for the infantry at Verkhe-Udinsk, between proceeding peaceably to Vladivostok by rail and fighting their way on foot for a thousand miles or more across the desert of Gobi. He shuddered at the thought of that contingency. And yet, he had only the word of a mysterious Lama that the first eventuality would come to pass.

That there was some odd influence at work in their own journey he felt sure. Several times at their night resting-places he had heard what he thought to be the thudding of strange hoofs, the distant tones of mysterious messengers. Twice he had seen with his own eyes groups of horsemen dogging their footsteps in the distance. Each time he had called the attention of their guides; each time the Mongols shrugged their shoulders and gesticulated to assure him that there was nothing to be feared.

They slept that night in the *yurta* of a group of wandering herdsmen, just below a mountain pass. At dawn they were off again, climbing the narrow defiles until at last they came out on a windswept pass-roof looking down into another valley. A thin shrill whistling rang in their ears as they looked below and Grant trembled with excitement as he gazed.

TWO silver parallel threads wound wound through the valley and a long dark worm-like object was creeping on the rails, white jets of steam puffing from it. The railroad!

"Cripes!" shouted Slim. "There's a train! And another, and other!"

They could gaze on that wandering rail line for miles from their vantage-point. Grant strained his eyes. Slim was right. Three trains were visible, all crawling to the east, probably a mile apart. As they looked they could see more trains, beyond.

"It's them!" cried Grant. "Thank God, the Twenty-seventh's on the way! There couldn't be any other train movement that would be so big."

They plunged down the trail that led into the valley, Grant's heart beating high. His hairbrained scheme had worked. A Yank lieutenant, aided and abetted by a loyal corporal, had checkmated a scheme that might have meant the loss of a regiment. He had bearded the Ogre of Chita in his den and walked away with the Ogre himself! They reached the valley bottom, not a quarter of a mile from the railway line, and the sudden *wheep! wheep!* of bullets past his head, the rattling bark of small arms, snapped him rudely from his dream.

Shooting as they came, a mob of fully fifty irregular horsemen was spurring towards them from the shelter of a pine forest not three hundred yards to their flank! The Buriat guides, shrieking something as they fled, buried their heads in their ponies' manes and ducked past them in headlong flight.

"Hun-Hutze! Hun-Hutze!"

The *Hun-Hutzes* — the dreaded cut-throat bandits—Chinese, Mongols, and Red Russians—who roamed the borderland! The masterless men of the Amur steppes, dreaded by all! The trio reined their ponies in, half turned to follow the deserting guides. Too late! Already the flankers of the advancing bandits had crossed the trail, cutting them off.

Grant felt his mount shudder. The animal stumbled to his knees, then fell, a dozen bullets in him. Grant flung himself free, pulling his pistol as he gained his feet. Seminoff's pony was down. Slim bounded from his saddle, plucking his own gun out. With one hand he dragged the Cossack free from the tangle, as Grant, lying behind his dead horse, cracked down on the leading men of the assailants.

"Down behind the horses!" cried Grant. "Shoot carefully!"

Three *Hun-Hutze* ponies went sprawling from his first three shots, their riders plunging headlong. Slim went into action and accounted for two more.

Then the howling horde was on them. Again and again the pistols cracked, emp-

tying a half dozen more saddles until, splitting like an Indian charge, the bandits swerved far to right and left. This was not at all what they had expected. But their parting volley did some damage.

Grant heard Slim yelp. Turning his head as he rapidly reloaded he saw the corporal nursing a limp right arm.

"They got me, the sons!" growled the corporal. "And I can't shoot with my left!"

Seminoff half raised himself from his shelter beside Slim and retrieved the pistol the other had dropped.

"I take it," he remarked, "that under the circumstances you have no objection to my joining the fight. We are all in the same boat now."

"Hell, no! Welcome to the party!"

"Here they come again," called the Cossack. "Let's take all the shelter we can."

The trio snuggled close to the two dead animals. Grant and the Cossack, nursing their fire, took toll of the raiders, who again could not bring themselves to close, swerving out as they passed.

A SECOND time the *Hun-Hutzes* rallied beyond pistol range. This time they clustered and appeared to be holding a council of war. The trio counted their remaining ammunition. They had a clipful each for the two pistols. Slim swore as he watched the other two split up the remaining cartridges. He had wrapped a handkerchief about his bleeding wrist as best he could.

"They win the next time," commented Grant.

Seminoff smiled wryly.

"I would suggest," he remarked, "that the last three bullets be saved for ourselves. These people are not nice to their prisoners, even when they are not enraged. And just now they must be quite angry."

"You can only die once, General," broke in Slim, "and you're going to be a long time dead. Anyone who wants it can have my bullet."

Grant nodded his acquiescence. The Cossack shrugged.

"Here they come."

The three, crouching behind the shelter of the dead horses, gazed earnestly at the clump of woods in the edge of which the *Hun-Hutzes* were forming once more. Several shots rattled out. Hoarse shouts rang down the wind. Grant jumped to his feet and pointed.

"Look! Look down the road!"

Paralleling the railway was a rough roadway of sorts. Coming up this was a compact body of mounted men, above whose heads bright lance-heads winked in the sun.

The others sprang to their feet. The column on the road was breaking up as its foremost riders spread fanlike, galloping towards the woods in a line of foragers, their lances leveled. The bandits burst from the shelter of the trees in a disorganized rabble, spurring for the shelter of the foothills. Grant jammed his pistol into its holster and turned to Seminoff.

"This is what we term, in English, 'out of the frying-pan into the fire,'" he announced—and Seminoff chuckled.

The rescuing party came softly thudding through the snow, their ponies' hoofs sending up little spurts of white. There was no mistaking that uniform—the sheepskin cap, like a truncated cone; the long blue *caftans* and silver trimming of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks!

They swept in a ring about the trio, pulling their ponies on their haunches. Grant's eyes swept a vista of fierce, bearded faces behind the steam from the animals' nostrils. Seminoff stepped out with outraised hand and an officer plunged forward, his curved saber flashing in salute. A murmur of surprise ran through the files.

The Cossack detachment commander had flung himself from his horse and was now engaged in rapid conversation with his chief, who was flinging question after question at him in a low voice. Grant busied himself with rebandaging Slim's hand.

"We may not have another chance," he explained. "I imagine that our goose is cooked. But there's one thing sure," he added with grim pleasure, "our troops have the trains."

Seminoff turned from his conference with the other Cossack.

"My officer tells me," he said, "that your garrison at Verkhe-Udinsk is on its way back to Vladivostok. He says that the last train passed through Chita early this morning, according to telegraphic messages received at his post, Komarnaya, and it is expected through there at any minute. Komarnaya is only a few versts away, northwest of where we are now, so that this train should come along shortly."

HE gazed at them for a bit, conflicting emotions showing on his face.

"I really should crucify you both. But

you,"—pointing to Slim,—"pulled me from under my horse where I lay at the mercy of the bandits, and you, Lieutenant, I admire against my will for having accomplished the impossible. Had anyone told me I could be kidnaped in the midst of my own troops I would have thought him crazy. Besides, we fought side by side a few moments ago."

He gave an order and a Cossack, dismounting, turned over his pony to his commander, hopping up behind a comrade.

Seminoff gathered his reins.

"My regards to your commanding officer," he called. "Tell him I shake his hand. *Amour sayn!* Goodbye!"

Grant and Slim, speechless, watched the Cossack *sotnia* ride down the road.

"I'll be damned!" said the officer after a moment.

"That goes double, Lieutenant."

"Well, now to flag this train when it comes along."

Grant turned to the railway track.

"I hope we don't have any more visiting bandits dropping in on us. It might be embarrassing. I wonder what happened to our Buriats."

He glanced back to where the trail down which they had come wound into the hills. A moving speck caught his eye. A lone horseman was riding fast towards them. Nothing else living was in sight. Grant drew his pistol and waited.

Closer came the stranger, undaunted by the drawn weapon, until the features of their mysterious Lama, the messenger of the Abbot of Urga, were visible under the fur cap.

GRANT put away his automatic as their visitor pulled up and swung from his pony.

"Praise be that you are safe!" he exclaimed. "The Brethren of Ta Kure were watching your way. We would have rescued you from the *Hun-Hutzes* but the presence of a *sotnia* of Seminoff's Cossacks was something that we did not expect."

"So you were the mysterious person following us through the journey, were you?"

The Lama smiled.

"You discovered that, did you? Yes, it was I. All is well now. Your troops are moving through. The Japanese will have to follow. There will be no united Asia, under Japanese leadership. Soon, I hope, the living Buddha will regain his throne and Mongolia be a free country again."

Somewhere in the distance a locomotive whistle shrilled.

"I don't know who you are," said Grant, "but the United States should be thankful to you for preventing disaster to its troops. Through you I have accomplished nearly all my mission. There is only one thing left undone. I was ordered to find out who this man Partridge was."

"I can explain that," responded the Lama. "This man Partridge was the son of an American who had settled in Urga years ago, and who had married a Russian woman. He had always been interested in Mongolian affairs and from time to time was able to send information regarding the plans of Japan to the State Department. When the situation reached a critical point, with the living Buddha imprisoned, he, through certain influence he was able to bear in Lamist circles, and knowing that the Abbot of Urga was at that time in Vladivostok, hurried himself to that city, so that America would not be unprepared—and, if possible, to mold opinion in Buddhist high places."

Grant nodded.

"A brave man," he answered. "Too bad he had to die in accomplishing his purpose."

AGAIN the locomotive shrieked. They could see the puffing clouds of steam as it lumbered down the track towards them, not half a mile away.

"A brave man died in accomplishing his purpose," agreed the Lama gravely. "But it was not Partridge—it was his business partner, a fur-dealer in Urga. *My* name is Partridge, but I am known here as Dochun Lama, leader of the Brethren of Ta Kure."

He swung into his saddle as the pair gazed goggle-eyed, tossed up a hand in farewell, and galloped his pony back up the trail.

Clanking and rattling on the ice-crusted sleepers, the long troop-train, its locomotive pushing ahead of it a flat car upon which lay hard-featured Yankee doughboys, with rifles at the ready, came chugging up. Grant and Slim, shouting their identity, reached for the helping hands stretched out to them and swung themselves on board. Standing on the flat car, they looked back. Dochun Lama had pulled up and was watching them from a little eminence. Again his hand went up in greeting. They waved back. Then the Siberian forests swallowed his figure.

THE END.

Local newspaper records confirm this vivid story of a nurse's extraordinary experience.

The Soul Surgeon

By **Anna L. Fitzgerald-Starzl**

I COMPLETED my training course in 1922, and within a month had an experience which nearly finished my career as a nurse. I went on registry at Sioux City, and as work was rather slack, all of us eagerly took any case that came our way, although it often meant exhausting work under primitive conditions.

On a dismal January night I received a telephone-call from the registry office: "Dr. Strobolsky of Ponca Landing wants a nurse to assist him in an emergency operation."

I had never heard of the Doctor, but the girl explained that he lived near Ponca, Nebraska. I was to catch the haphazard little freight train which is supposed to pull out of Sioux City about ten-thirty, and the Doctor would meet me at Ponca. I seized my ready-packed bag and called a taxi.

Although the trip was only twenty miles or so, it took a good two hours. At Jackson the track began to wind in and out among the hills, which were covered with soggy snow, looking ominous and spectral under a leaden sky. Abandoned at last on the little station platform in almost complete darkness, with nothing for company but the steady slow drip of melting snow, I wondered if the Doctor had been compelled to proceed with the operation without a nurse.

After some minutes of depressing uncertainty, I heard the roar of an open cut-out to the north, and soon afterward saw the flickering yellow headlights of a car sliding and swaying down the last hill. With many creaks and groans it came to a stop in the slushy snow, and a man's voice called:

"Are you the nurse?" When I assented, he ordered: "Hurry, get in!"

It was a badly used old touring car. When he raced the motor, the lights were fairly bright, but at ordinary running speeds one could hardly see the rutted road. I crawled into the back seat through tattered curtains and we were on our way.

"What kind of a case is it, Doctor?" I asked after we had started.

PERHAPS he didn't hear me. At any rate he did not answer. The sense of foreboding which I had been fighting all evening began to steal over me again.

I had not yet seen the Doctor's face, but from where I sat I could see the loom of his shoulders and head against the road. In that dim light he seemed extraordinarily huge. He had on a heavy overcoat of some shaggy fur, and a tall fur cap. He drove like a demon, with remarkable skill. We plunged down long, steep roads with the motor wide open, lurched around curves close to the edge of blackness, and after three or four miles, entered the utter darkness of a cut through the bluffs which, after many windings and break-neck hairpin curves, brought us to the edge of the Missouri River. We had come to a ferry-boat landing, but no ferry-boat had been running for two months. I could dimly see a strip of snow-covered ice about two hundred feet wide along the shore, and beyond that a river of ink which occasionally broke into little glistening points of light. The river was not entirely frozen over, but was apparently safe for travel close to shore, for I saw wheel-tracks in the snow on the ice.

We bounced down the landing-stage to the ice, and began to travel south again. Here the going was fairly smooth, and I attempted again to engage the Doctor in conversation. Finally he turned around, letting go the wheel, and in a voice peculiarly light for so huge a figure, said:

"Shut up if you value your life."

I shut up, too scared, almost, to move, but trying desperately to think of a way out of the situation. There was no longer any question about something being wrong.

"Probably just an old crank," I tried to tell myself. "The registry has the names of all the doctors in this territory. They wouldn't have sent me out on a fake call."

The only trouble with that was that while Dr. Strobolsky may have been a real doctor, I had no assurance that the man ahead was Strobolsky. His name might have been borrowed by some one else for a criminal purpose.

My gun! While at Des Moines to take the State board examinations, I had purchased a six-shooter at a pawn-shop, and had thrust it into my traveling-bag. With it were the cartridges which the dealer had thrown in on the sale.

Rummaging in the bottom of my bag, I found the gun, reassuringly harsh to the touch. My groping fingers also found the cartridge box, and crushing the cardboard at opposite corners, I burst it open and brought out a handful of the smooth, cold, heavy little cylinders.

The cartridges didn't fit. I had looked at a number of guns, and the pawnbroker had given me the wrong cartridges. They were .38 caliber, and the gun was a .32!

For a wild moment I considered clubbing him with the butt of the gun. Three things restrained me: I rather doubted my ability to swing the weapon in that enclosed space hard enough to stun him through the big fur cap; I feared that in the event of a struggle we would swerve into the dim black current in midstream; I still had a faint hope that I was being frightened by an overactive imagination. After all, that curt remark of his may have been merely a reference to the dangers of the short-cut we were taking.

In a few more minutes a light appeared on the shore. It drew near and resolved itself into the uncurtained window of a sway-backed farmhouse bulking darkly against the gray slope of a bluff. A huge, shadowy dog appeared and growled ferociously. Dr. Strobolsky cursed, and the dog slunk away; but woe to the stranger, I thought, who might run afoul of the beast! My half-formed plan of climbing the bluff and walking to the nearest farmhouse had to be abandoned.

WITH a feeling of repulsion I followed the Doctor into the kitchen. It was equipped with an old wood-burning stove which the Doctor now replenished, a wooden sink, zinc-lined, with a hand pump, a cupboard and a table, the latter loaded with dirty dishes.

If the Doctor had been surly, he was becoming more affable. He had shed his furs and stood warming his hands. He had on a striped jersey sweater of a most peculiar and outlandish color mixture, corduroy trousers—and his great frame was supported by small, almost effeminate feet in patent-leather shoes. In addition to the heavy overshoes he had been wearing, his shoes were protected by heavy wool socks pulled on over them.

But the most arresting thing about him was his head. It was large—the hackneyed term "leonine" would apply. His heavy yellow hair was brushed back to his neck. His features were large and rugged, but what arrested and held attention was his eyes. They were large, amber, brilliant and far apart. The man himself, I learned later, was over fifty-five, but his eyes were ageless. I avoided looking at them, having the uneasy notion he could hypnotize me.

"Our patient is in the operating-room," the Doctor announced.

There were only two other rooms besides the kitchen, a bedroom, and what had formerly been the living-room, now the surgery. I was surprised by it. Expecting the most primitive sort of arrangements, I saw equipment that would do fairly well for a second-rate hospital. Two gasoline lanterns which the Doctor lighted illuminated white painted walls, a floor of cement, standard tables and cabinets for instruments. Yet everything had the appearance of being long unused, and a faint odor made me long to open windows. But there were no windows. They had been boarded up recently, for the heads of the nails were still bright.

"But I don't see any patient," I said uneasily.

He looked with a start of genuine surprise at a cot in the corner. "That's funny. I saw her there only a minute ago."

HE examined the cot more closely, as if to satisfy himself that it really was empty.

Finally he said: "Never mind her. She'll be back in a little while."

I said: "But Doctor, if she was able to get up and walk away, why didn't you bring her to Sioux City to operate?"

He stared sullenly.

"And besides," I added, "how could she get away, with that dog of yours out there?"

He looked at me for a minute. Then he said easily: "Oh, the dog knows her. She's here often. But I don't understand why she isn't sleeping here. I gave her a half-grain of morphine."

My terror was rising again. The dog started to howl, and his eerie wails were thrown back by the bluffs, doubly heart-breaking, doubly terrifying, through the thin walls of the cheaply built house.

"Pan Longin is howling for his soul," the Doctor remarked. His grand features broke down into a smirk.

My scalp tingled. *"What?"* I asked.

"His soul," the Doctor repeated carelessly. "I have it here in this bottle." He took down a small bottle from a row of similar ones on a shelf. It was tightly stoppered and sealed with beeswax.

My question was answered. The Doctor was insane, and he had lured me here for what purpose I dared not imagine. I had no doubt now that the missing patient was only a hallucination. The problem before me now was to get away without inciting him to violence. I had heard that to get along with insane patients the best plan is to humor them. Although I made poor work of it, I tried to speak calmly.

"You say you have your dog's soul in there. Do you have souls in the other bottles?"

"Yes. Dogs, cats, pigs, cattle. I have their souls in those bottles, working for mankind."

As he expounded his pet mania, he became quite animated. His wondrous eyes shone with fanatical light, and it would have been easy to see in him a great dreamer, a charterer of new seas, a conqueror of darkness. My interest in what he was saying was assumed—I was busy trying to think of a way of escape; but I remember the gist of what he told me. He believed that all sickness, death even, was the result of an intrinsic defect of the soul. The exact nature of this ailing soul he did not explain, but his newly-to-be-announced method of treatment was to take the soul out, just as a surgeon takes out an appendix. Should the patient ever want his frailties back, the Doctor said, his soul could easily be returned to him—surgically.

The missing patient had been complaining of sickness. Because she was the first human being to submit to this operation, I had been called to assist—although, the Doctor deprecated, the operation was simplicity itself.

FOR over an hour we continued that incredible conversation, but the Doctor showed signs of weariness. His explanations were less lucid. He seemed to forget my presence for minutes at a time, to stand muttering and mewing before his soul-bottles.

I seized one of these intervals to creep into the kitchen. My intention was to set the house afire. In the excitement I could escape, and the glow of the blaze might attract help.

Hardly had I reached the stove when I heard his step behind me. Muttering and cursing, he rushed through the kitchen and out of doors. I breathed easier—looked for a telephone, but the call to the registry must have been put in from somewhere else.

A few minutes later I heard him coming back. He stopped short when he saw me.

"Here at last, Mary? And I've been waiting all night for you. Hurry, let's get it over with!"

"I'm not Mary!" I cried desperately. "I'm the nurse you called to help you. Don't you remember?"

"Come, Mary!" he said more gently. He rubbed his hand over his eyes, swaying under the yellow kitchen lamp, little rivulets of melted snow running off his soaked patent-leather shoes. "Come, Mary! I'm very tired. It'll only be a little while, and you'll never be sick again."

As he started toward me, hand outstretched, I picked up a billet of stovewood. Retreating, I rained blows on him, yet he kept coming on steadily. I knew that if he cornered me, I could never escape. I was hemmed in on one side by the glowing stove, on the other by the wall. "Come, Mary!" he urged soothingly.

At the very door, which had been left an inch or so ajar, came a dismal howling.

The Doctor turned his head. "A life of labor I've given for this success, and no one appreciates it. —Pan Longin, be still! Come, Mary!"

With a blow of my stick I knocked down the stovepipe, filling the room instantly with choking wood-ashes and acrid wood-smoke. The Doctor leaped to replace the pipe, oblivious of his scorching hands. I was not afraid of the dog now. A greater terror had wiped out my fear of poor, wet, miserable Pan Longin. I dashed out, intent only on reaching the concealing underbrush along the bank. Calling to me anxiously, the Doctor followed. I could hear his heavy footsteps and breathing.

But the silent river ice had become alive, shattered by the roar of an exhaust that blended with the dog's barking, shorn of its mystery by stabbing headlights. A car came skidding perilously around the bend, close inshore. I ran toward it, screaming. . . . .

The Doctor made no resistance, but shortly after being put in the village jail became a raving maniac. I rode back in the overloaded car on a rough but safe township road, beside a young woman named Mary McGoun, who had, out of neighborly kindness, occasionally called to straighten up the lone physician's house. Realizing, too late, her peril, she had feigned sleep while resisting the opiate with all her power; had escaped as soon as the Doctor left, had walked several miles to rouse a farmer, and brought back the posse to rescue the unknown nurse who, she knew, would be in great peril. Mary did not tell me this herself, however. She was sleeping soundly.

Castaways Under Fire

By **Captain R. S. Hewitt**

DAWN had come on the wide wastes of the North Atlantic. Three hundred miles west of Fasnet Rock Light, that lonely sentinel off the southwest coast of Ireland, the freighter *Stanley* was steering a course east by north and making about ten knots. The time was 6:50 A. M. on March 21st, 1917. I was in charge of the watch as the second officer had just commenced a sharp lookout for submarines, when without the slightest warning there was a terrific explosion abaft the bridge, and up into the air went coal, water, ashes, steam and pieces of our ship.

It didn't take many seconds to realize that we had been torpedoed, also our engines put out of commission, and so we lay helpless, unable to maneuver the ship. The boats were soon in the water, loaded with their human freight. They waited alongside while the Captain, assisted by me, sent up three distress-signal rockets.

We were glad when this was finished, as the submarine, probably as a warning, put three shells into the chart-room just under our feet. This made us fleet of foot, and we were soon down the lifelines and into the boat. We pulled well clear of the ship, and then watched her rise up on end before taking her final plunge with five dead shipmates on board, killed in the explosion.

It was a heart-rending scene, as any seaman knows who has witnessed the sinking of his ship.

After this the submarine also submerged and left us alone with the wreckage on a desolate, wintry ocean three hundred miles from land. There was a heavy northerly swell running with a fresh north-northeast wind; so we rigged our lugsail and set a course for the Irish coast. We set off, making good headway, and hopeful of being soon picked up. After a few hours we sighted a four-masted barque, and I altered

The crew of the torpedoed freighter Stanley were taken for enemy decoys and fired upon.

our course toward her; but when about two miles distant the barque altered her course away from us, and was soon out of sight. The second day one of our crew died—after we had put in a hard winter night, the wind at times rising to gale force, accompanied by hail and sleet. During these squalls I had to take the sail off.

The third day found us making about five knots, with very cold weather. Some of our crew were so woefully short of clothing we had to do a bit of sharing to even matters up; but still the cold ate into our very bones. Our food consisted of one biscuit and two drinks of water a day—this latter equaled about half a tumblerful all told, for we had to be very careful with water, not knowing when we'd be rescued.

By the morning of the fourth day our feet had begun to swell badly. Some of the men took off their boots to try and get ease, but their feet swelled so rapidly they found it impossible to get them on again.

This day was my twenty-fourth birthday. About 10 A. M. we sighted a steamer steering to the westward. I altered our course to intercept, feeling sure of a birthday present in the form of being picked up—but we were soon disillusioned, for when we got within a mile and a half of this one, she not only turned away and left us, but commenced to shell our little craft! We quickly downed sail and mast, and lay helpless.

After firing fourteen shells at us, fortunately none coming closer than twenty feet, she was out of effective range and soon out of sight. The strange behavior of these two ships was on account of submarines at that time frequently disguising themselves by hoisting a small boat-sail and steaming with only their conning-tower above water; thus, appearing like a lifeboat, they were likely to attract an unwary ship toward them.

After this experience we were not overanxious to sight any more craft, preferring to rely on our own efforts. Sail was hoisted again, but the wind had veered round to east-northeast. This caused us to make so much southing that we gave up hopes of reaching the Irish coast, and put faith in the English Channel where probably an Allied warcraft would be sighted. We were getting in a sorry plight by this time, for with the salt-water drying on our faces and clothes we appeared more like snowmen than humans. Gangrene had commenced to play havoc with our hands and feet.

BY the night of March 25th I estimated we were about one hundred and thirty miles west of the Scilly Islands which lie off the southwest coast of England.

The morning of the 26th found us in what is known in seamen's parlance as the "Chops of the channel." The sky was laden with heavy gray clouds and the wind was whistling ominously, also a nasty sea rising. We kept going as long as possible, but the wind increased to such force that we had to take in sail, and put out a sea anchor to keep head-on to the sea. This didn't prove sufficient, so I rigged up a small "leg-o'-mutton" sail aft. At times we were taking heavy spray on board, which kept us constantly bailing.

During this day we sighted three steamers, but with the heavy sea running I doubt whether any saw us. Our messroom steward's feet were very bad by this time, being quite black and swollen badly; and a negro sailor was but little better off. We were all merely skin and bone, with little strength to make any great effort.

When the sun went down in the evening the wind still blew with gale force. During the night our boat was yawing badly, and a great rolling sea broke against us, half filling the boat and turning it completely round in a second. We had to bail rapidly as we lay so low in the water; another such sea would have finished us.

The wind kept up throughout the night, and many anxious moments were spent watching the great rolling seas sweep past us. The morning of the 27th came without any change in the weather; there was a high sea running, and frequent squalls of hail and rain. No ships were sighted this day. The men's feet were getting very bad now—the mess steward's feet were simply crumbling away. Although he must have suffered intensely he never complained, yet he was only a boy in his teens.

A negro sailor called Johnson had been stowed away in the locker in the fore-end of the boat for over a day. A sailor looked in once, then came along to me, saying:

"Johnson is dead, sir."

"Then put him over the side," I replied.

We made numerous efforts to get him out of that locker but without avail. He looked to us to be as dead as he ever would be—but apparently he had only lost consciousness due to cold and short rations, for the next day while we were being picked up, Johnson came back to life, though he nearly did pass out when told what we tried to do the day previous! Two cadets I had in the boat had been drinking salt-water, and were now suffering terrible agony, constantly crying out for water. I gave them very sparing sips in an effort to ease their craving. Just before dark a big sea broke against us, damaging the rudder. Night came on with the wind falling but still a high sea was running, so we spread the wet sail over ourselves to obtain shelter.

Just before dawn on the 28th I commenced to try repairing the broken rudder. The weather I thought was fine enough now to get sail on again at daylight. About 5:30 A. M. while working on the rudder, I looked up and saw the dark shape of a steamer going past with no light showing.

I shouted to the men: "Come along, boys! Here's a steamer." They all came suddenly to life. I said: "When I give the word, we'll shout together 'Ship Ahoy!' "

We tried this several times, but I'm afraid our voices were too weak to carry over the distance which separated us from the steamer. I felt in my pocket for my bridge-whistle which all officers carry, but found it was choked up with wet tobacco.

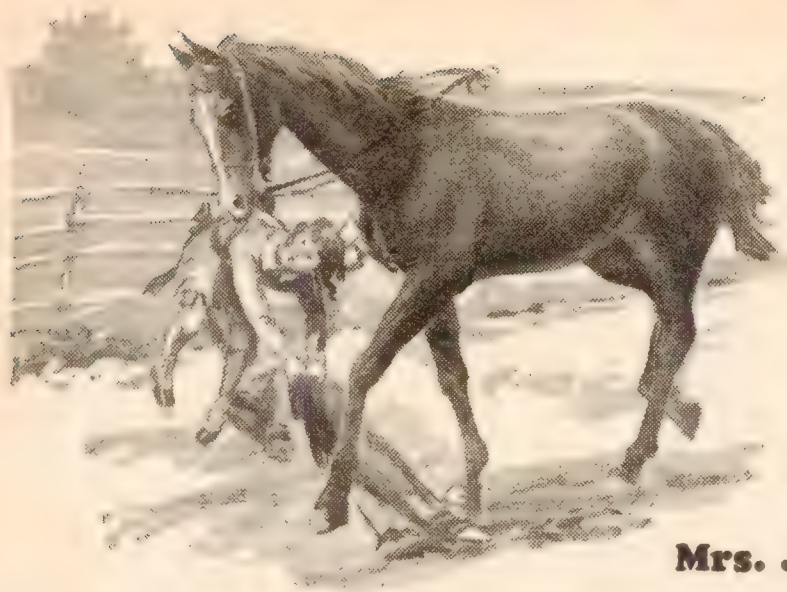
I was desperate by this time, as I saw our last chance slipping away. Then hope came again in the form of our little oil-lamp. I grabbed this and Morsed the distress-call S. O. S. with my old cap. I had sent it only twice when I saw it answered with one quick flash.

I ordered the men to ship their oars, but when they tried to row, I saw they were too weak, so I double-banked the oars and anxiously watched the loom of the steamer. I found to my joy that she was maneuvering to get alongside us. Half an hour after our sighting her she was alongside.

IT was still dark and a good swell running. This latter helped more than it hindered, for as our boat rose on the top of a swell, two of our men were pulled out by those on the steamer. This procedure was carried out until our thirteen men were all safely on board. The steamer turned out to be the British freighter *Mokta*, bound to the Abrollas Rocks off Brazil to coal some British ships lying off there. I was helped up to the navigating bridge as I wished to thank the Captain. I found him pacing back and forth with a revolver. This he put away when he saw me staggering about. He said he was afraid it was a German decoy, and had determined to shoot the first man who came on his bridge.

We thought that now our sufferings were ended, but we were wrong, for as soon as our rescuers commenced to massage our feet we suffered agony. It is impossible to describe the intense pain when bodily circulation starts again after it has been stopped for a number of days!

The *Mokta* landed us in Dakar, French Senegal, where we spent a month in the hospital. The steward lost both feet, and Johnson five toes and a finger. These two men we left in the hospital when we sailed on the Ellerman liner *City of Poona*. This steamer was twice attacked by submarines on the way home, but eventually landed us safely in London, nine weeks after we had been torpedoed.



There are geniuses among men, and among dogs and horses too. This story is of an equine genius.

By
Mrs. J. C. Coyle

Frank Does His Duty

I WAS about six, and small for my age, when I went to live with Uncle Jim and Aunt Katie on their farm, about four miles from Crete, Nebraska. My father was a farmer too, and I was accustomed to livestock, so it wasn't long before I began to make four-footed friends. Frank, a spindle-legged bay colt, was one of the first and firmest of these.

While I got along very well with my cousins,—two girls and two boys,—Fritz, a youngster of about nine, became a pest to my equine friend. He was always playing some kind of prank on the colt, such as feeding him an apple loaded with pepper. But Frank learned quickly, and what he learned he never forgot—practical jokes included. He bided his time to get even.

Mischievous Fritz had a habit of playing on the windmill which pumped water for the big watering-tank in the horse lot, in spite of the fact that his parents had repeatedly warned him to stay off.

Frank was nibbling grass one day when he spied Fritz clinging to the blades of the mill, which was out of gear, the control-stick secured to a hook some five feet from the ground. Leaping the fence as though it were not in the way, the colt cantered over to the mill and grasping the control stick in his teeth pulled it loose from the hook. As he did so, the big mill swung into gear and slowly began to turn.

I screamed, then stood paralyzed with fright; I was sure Fritz would be thrown off and killed. But he clung terrified to the mill as it gained momentum, feet upon one pair of blades, hands grasping two others.

Once, twice, three times the big paddles turned, gaining speed as the wind caught them squarely. At my cries, my aunt had run into the yard, and frantically raced for the mill to shut it down. But she was too late. Fritz' grip gave way on a downward sweep, and he dropped like a stone—into the huge tank of water. The tank had just been pumped full and the water broke his fall so that my aunt dragged him out, a sorry-looking spectacle, but unhurt.

Frank never neglected an opportunity after that, when he caught Fritz near the watering-tank, of nosing him into it.

AS the gangling colt developed into a horse he showed an understanding of things which seemed almost human. It was fairly uncanny, the way he "caught on." Once he was sick for several days, and we were all worried for fear he was going to die. Every day the veterinarian would come from Crete, carrying a black medicine-case, to treat him. As Uncle held Frank's tongue out for the medicine to be administered, he would talk to him.

"Now, Frank," he would say, "stick out your tongue and let the man see if you are sick." Shortly after the colt recovered, a peddler stayed over night at our house.

Next morning, carrying his grips in his hands, he started for the barn to hitch up. Uncle accompanied him; and as they came near Frank, standing in the lot before the barn, the latter spied the grip. Stretching his neck full length, he stuck out his tongue, ready for a dose of medicine. We had a lot of fun after that, demonstrating this trick to admiring visitors. Unless some one carried a black suitcase, however, all efforts were in vain.

After Frank was broken to ride, and to drive to the buggy, I began to ride him occasionally to the school in Crete. I was about eight then, and still small for my age. I could ride fairly well, and Uncle would set me on Frank's back and say to him: "Now, Frank, take her to school and come on home." He was also used by Uncle and the boys to ride after the cattle, until finally he came to understand this part of his duties thoroughly. After that, Uncle would lead him through the pasture gate, point toward where the cows were, and say: "Go get the cows, Frank." That was all that was necessary. If some cow proved obstinate about coming in, Frank's keen teeth, clamping down on her rump, would soon have her headed for the barn.

MY big adventure with Frank came when I was about eight. It was the teacher's birthday, and my cousins had hurried off early to help her prepare for a little party we were to have in honor of the event. I remained until the last moment, waiting for Auntie to do up my new yellow dress, which I was to wear for the occasion.

I was about halfway to the school when the unexpected happened. I had urged Frank into a slow lope, and was thinking of what a nice time we would have at the party, when one of those prairie whirlwinds, which are so common in that country, approached on our right. Frank stuck up his ears and shied at the swirling mass of dust, leaves and what-not, but I stroked his neck and he calmed down. All would have been well, but just as the whirlwind came opposite us, it gathered up a pile of cornhusks and other rubbish lying in a fence corner, and veering sharply across the road, pelted us with the flotsam from the rear.

This was more than a high-strung colt could be expected to bear, and Frank promptly bolted, leaving me lying flat in the dusty road. I got up and started hobbling toward the school, but my right leg hurt dreadfully at every step, and I made such slow progress that, childlike, I tumbled down by the roadside and lay sobbing, my face buried in the saddle blanket.

THERE were no automobiles on that country road in those days, and few wagons, and the other children who traveled to school that way were almost at their destination. Soon I recognized Frank's hoofbeats returning. His momentary fright over, he had remembered that he must take me to school.

Partly because my leg hurt so, and partly to see what Frank would do, I lay quite still, my face in the blanket. He came over where I lay and pushed me with his nose, this way and that. I lay perfectly limp, so finally he grasped the back of my dress, at the waist, firmly in his teeth, and started down the road in a brisk walk. I weighed less than fifty pounds, so I was not such a heavy load.

I still grasped the saddle-blanket, and now I tried to squirm around, get the horse by the mane, and pull myself on to his back. I couldn't do it, so I gave up and allowed him to carry me in his teeth. I knew Frank and his habits so well that I was not in the least frightened, but I can't say that my position was at all comfortable.

As we neared the schoolhouse I could catch glimpses of the teacher on the steps, and the children all lined up to enter. They had caught sight of Frank, carrying me swiftly toward them, and stood aghast at the spectacle, not knowing how badly I might be hurt. We passed a group of tardy children hurrying along, and they tried to stop us. Frank broke into a canter, however, and they desisted, fearing that I would be injured again. He carried me to the low fence which enclosed the schoolyard, and gently set me over it, near the end of the waiting line of children. Some one tried to catch him, but he bolted down the road toward home, bridle reins flying in the air. He had done his duty as he saw it. . . . .

After looking me over, the teacher decided that I was all right, except for a bruised leg and a shaking up. Then we all had a laugh over the spectacle of the big horse carrying me to school in his mouth, as a cat carries a kitten. The incident became the talk of the entire countryside for miles around. Though I have not been in the neighborhood for many years, and Frank is long since dead, there are probably many people still living there who will remember the incident.

Seven Minutes

A whole lifetime of experience was packed into this brief interval above the Western Front.

By **Howard Dunbar**

AS I reflect upon that great conflict which came about sixteen years ago, when all the world went mad, I remember the words of the first flight-leader I ever had. It was on my first flight over the enemy lines in France. He was a chap named Pierce, young, but with graying hair which spoke eloquently of the strain and torture of combat-flying.

He looked at me quizzically as I reported for my first patrol. I was quite cocky then.

"Lieutenant," he began, "do you know what the life of the average pursuit-pilot is?"

I managed to wring out my snappiest salute, and replied, "No sir."

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to his ship which a mechanic was warming up. "Well, Lieutenant, it is exactly seven minutes!" And with that, he swung into his cockpit and revved the engine.

His remark sure took the wind out of my sails! More than that, it left me with a queer, inexplicable feeling, and a sinking sensation around the pit of my stomach. Only when the orderly strode up and reported, "Your ship is ready, Lieutenant!" did I snap out of it.

And in another moment, a wave of the flight-leader's hand had sent the five Nieuports whirling into the grayish skies of the field. Steadily those words kept pounding through my head, "Seven minutes—seven minutes!" as I peered over the cowling of my cockpit and gazed on the world below.

But I wasn't permitted to muse for long. The flight-leader waggled his wings sharply and pointed his nose toward the west. There, coming down from ten thousand feet, and headed toward our flight, were six tiny specks. It took but an instant for them to become large planes, and in a moment more we had identified them as Taubes, enemy pursuit ships.

OUR flight-leader immediately turned back and flew to the rear of the V. I remember mentally thanking him for being considerate enough to come back and cover

me, the greenest of the flight. Just then, without any preliminaries, the fight began.

Two of the giant ships (they did seem frightfully big to me then) picked Pierce as their particular prey. Pierce was an accredited ace, even at that early stage of the game—and aces always came in for more than their share of the bullets.

I stood pat in my own ship, waiting for something to happen. In the instant before action came, I remember reviewing hastily all of the instructions which the men back at the training-fields had issued concerning active combat tactics.

Suddenly the cowling in front of me was splintering from enemy bullets.

Bringing the stick back against my stomach, I whirled about. Instantly I recognized the fact that an enemy plane was riding high and on my tail. Something must be done to get him out of that strategic position! In a moment my sturdy little Nieuport responded to the controls.

Round and round we went, the Nieuport and the Taube, the pilot of each waiting only for a little additional speed to creep up on the other's tail, flatten out, and send a final burst shattering through the victim's body.

But that moment never came. Pierce, about two thousand feet above us, had been defeated by his two enemies. As his ship hurtled down in a maddening spin which would end only when the brown earth below reached up and embraced it, its pilot must have made a lightning decision. He was "going West," but he'd send at least another of the enemy along with him. On his way down, the Taube on my tail must have lined itself beautifully in his sights—and I imagine his last bit of energy went into the squeezing of those trigger-releases for a long burst which met the Taube directly below its center section.

I had been saved from death by a man who was on the way to his own!

I felt a mad desire to get the pilots who had sent that beloved flight-leader to his doom, and I sent the Nieuport in a dizzy climb for altitude.

Another Taube came whirling out of nowhere, trying to get in position for a direct burst. Instantly I swerved over, and instead of slipping away from his path as the pilot expected, I stayed right with him. He slipped sidewise and down, and in an instant I slipped and dived with him.

For three thousand feet we both continued that mad downward dive; for three thousand feet our engines raced and pounded, while the wind blowing through taut flying-wires screeched like a banshee. With eyes for nothing else save each other, we dived side by side, wondering when the nerve or the physical stamina of the other would break.

THEN it came. Slipping away, the enemy pilot attempted to redress and bring his right wing up. I was at his left. The advantage was entirely mine. Bringing the stick back, which brought my nose over to the right (I was in a steep bank, and elevators operated as rudders in that position) I lined his tail in my sights. As the whitish trail of tracers aided my aim, I brought the nose of the Nieuport about little by little, until the white stream marked the passage of a dozen bullets squarely into the fuselage of the Jerry pilot. It was over!

I watched dazedly as the Taube circled about for a moment in a flat spin. Then the nose fell over and the long spinning dive to earth began. The blood raced through my own temples, my thoughts concentrating on the helplessness of that pilot who but a minute ago had been alive and confident of victory over me.

I don't know how long I remained in a trance as I watched the Taube crash into the brown dirt below, between the jagged lines of barbed wire. But I was awakened rudely by the screaming of anti-aircraft shells alongside my ship, and the bursting of black puffs of smoke all around me. I was within range of the Archies!

Instantly I pulled the stick back against my stomach, and in a few moments had reached a safe altitude again. Looking about me, I saw Donovan and Klem flying back toward home. I realized then that two of my flight comrades must have flown the last long trail, and I was a very frightened young pilot as I headed the Nieuport for home and the field.

We were a solemn group as we climbed out of our cockpits that morning. Our flight-leader had been loved by all of us—and Briggs, a veteran beloved by his brother pilots, had been another casualty.

In making out my report that night, with the aid of Donovan, I noticed a queer thing. It seemed that Fate itself had decreed it. Perhaps not—but at any rate, the figures on my report pointed out the fact that exactly seven minutes after I had taken the air on my first flight, I had landed my first enemy aircraft victory!

A coal-miner here sets down the amazing story of his entombment for several days in a burning mine and of his ultimate rescue.

By **John Burns**

Trapped in a Burning Mine

IT never occurred to me to write a story before—perhaps because I never had anything to write about. But after having gone through a mine explosion about five weeks ago and come out alive, I believe I have an interesting story to tell.

Having worked in various coal-mines since a small lad, I think I may be classed as a typical coal-miner. I have worked all the jobs inside a coal-mine from trapper to fire-boss, and in five different States. Sometimes my roll contained a thousand dollars and sometimes but the price of one meal. On many shifts I have made twenty-five dollars in eight hours; other times I have worked as many, or more, hours and made only three or four dollars.

The usual number of narrow escapes have come my way. A miner gets used to having slate fall close to him, sometimes upon his head or back. Drilling out shots that didn't go, "trips" getting out of control when the track is wet, and no sand in the locomotive and sandboxes—or maybe the sandpipes would be clogged. Many times I have accidentally ignited the gas in open-light mines and hugged the bottom until it burned out. But all of this is in the day's work and it is forgotten when the shift is ended.

MY biggest experience came last month. Just three weeks after my buddy and boyhood friend, Tom Mallory, and I had secured a job loading coal on the night shift at the M— mine, it blew up. The explosion started in Eighteen Butt while we were driving a heading in Fourteen Butt. This is a shaft mine. Much gas was being generated from the coal, therefore battery lamps were being used in this "pit." It is supposed that a top cutting machine, cutting in Eighteen Butt, ignited the gas, and this caused the coal-dust to explode. Tom was at the face of our heading, drilling a hole with a hand auger. I was about thirty feet down the entry, making dummies out of clay. These were to be placed behind the powder and tamped into the holes that Tom was drilling. Then the shot-firer would come around and shoot our place. The coal was projecting out from the rib about three feet just ahead of where I was sitting, and this probably saved my life. The first I knew of the explosion was when I heard a loud rumble like a mighty wind approaching. The next thing I remember I was scratching the coal dirt off my face and chest. The force of the explosion had knocked me over backward. The projecting coal had broken the force somewhat and thanks to that, I was still living. Fortunately my lamp was not damaged much. The lens was broken, but the bulb was O. K. and still burning. After making sure I had no broken bones, I started to look around for my buddy. I spied the auger he had been using, sticking out of a pile of débris composed of coal, slate, timbers and brick. Throwing some of this to one side,

I uncovered his feet first and then the rest of his body. He must have received the full force of the explosion; he had been killed instantly. Seeing he was beyond human aid, I began to take stock of myself. My face and hands were bleeding from hundreds of small lacerations caused by flying coal and slate. For a while I was very dizzy, but when my brain began to clear, I started to make my way out of the place. Dust and smoke was everywhere—so thick that my lamp hardly gave any light at all. My ears were full of coal-dirt, and my clothing was in tatters.

Presently recollection came to me of the deadly "black-damp." I tore off what was left of my shirt, crawled to a small pool of water, and wetting the cloth, I placed it over my nose and mouth. Remembering that bad air would be near the roof, I kept as low as possible to the bottom, crawling most of the time. I re-soaked the shirt each time I ran across some water.

THE dust had begun to settle by this time, but everything was changed. Brick stoppings on each side had been blown down, and bricks were scattered all around; timbers were lying on every side; the track was torn up in many places. Not much of the roof slate had fallen at this point. Next I came to a dead horse; his harness had been blown completely off. Near the horse I found the driver, with one arm and one leg missing—he was dying when I reached him. Near by lay what had been an empty mine wagon, which the driver had been bringing to our heading for us to load.

Climbing over a small slate fall, I noticed the body of a man lying near, with a spike-bar tightly clenched in his right hand. I found out later that this was Mike Benson, who with his helper Roy Black had been mending a broken switch at the mouth of Fourteen Butt. They found Roy's body under the slate nearly a week later. Examining Benson's lamp, I found the battery in good shape, and thinking I might need it later, I took it along.

By now I was about two thousand feet from where the explosion had occurred about forty-five minutes before. The air was getting worse all the time. My lungs felt heavy and I was beginning to feel very sleepy. The shaft was about three miles from this section of the mine. Knowing I could never reach there before being overcome by afterdamp, I started racking my brain for some place to brattice myself off against this foul air, and happened to remember a hole that had been bored down from the outside to allow a pipe to go through. Water from this section of the mine was pumped out that way. Knowing that fresh air would be coming down this small hole, I determined to go there if possible.

By this time sleep was about to get the best of me. I started to wet my face more often, but the sulphur that is in the mine water got into the lacerations on my face and they burned like fire. My throat was parched and dry; sweat was coming from every pore on my body. The air, what little there was, felt hot as an oven. I would never have believed that I could drink the filthy mine-water—but now I drank what seemed to be gallons of it, to ease my tortured throat.

As I came upon a "trip" of mine wagons loaded with coal and headed toward the shaft, I noticed the coal had been leveled off smooth with the tops of the wagons. There were about sixty wagons in this trip. Crawling alongside, I reached the electric locomotive coupled to the end wagon. Here I found the operator sitting in the deck, dead. The brakeman was between the first and second wagon, also dead. Both men were burned so badly they were unrecognizable.

Slate falls were more numerous now, for the roof was very bad at this point. Twice I narrowly escaped being caught by falling slate. One piece struck my ankle, but did not hurt much.

An hour had passed by this time; I was beginning to be surprised I was still alive. Fortunately I had not lost my head and started to run—that would have been fatal, for running would have caused me to breathe faster, causing too much bad air to enter my lungs. I began trying to figure how long it would take the rescue crew to reach me. Then I remembered I was three miles in, and realized it would be some time before they could penetrate that far into the workings.

SLEEP was just about to get the best of me when I reached the mouth of Thirteen Butt. With a mighty effort I kept awake and pressed onward. I remember passing two horses and several men here, but I did not stop. They had been dead for some time, anyway. The going was a little easier here; there was not so much

débris—it seemed to have been swept clean. The slate had fallen at some places where the timbers had been knocked out. All of the stopping had been swept away.

I went about one hundred yards before discovering I had passed the room which led to the bore hole. Turning back, I stumbled onto a dinner-pail lying near the track. It was battered, but the top was still in place, and the eats still inside. Placing the extra battery under my left arm, I carried the pail in my left hand while with my right hand I held the wet shirt to my nose and mouth.

Finally I found the mouth of Number Three room and thought I could feel a draft of fresh air coming out that way. Feeling very weak and tired, I decided to rest here a moment. Fear of going to sleep drove me on.

About two hundred and fifty feet from the mouth of this room I found the pump with the pipe going toward the surface. Crawling to this pipe, I stood up and inhaled the sweetest breath of air I had ever known in my life. Now I felt safe for a while at least, and after standing here for about twenty minutes, I began to feel revived. The urge to sleep left me; I felt strong enough to build a barrier of some kind to keep the damp away. Having read of trapped miners doing this sort of thing, I began to look around to find something to build one with. Opening a small cock on the air-chamber of the pump near by, I was delighted to find that the valves were holding the water from running back through the pump, and a small stream of water would run out of the cock when opened. Although the water was very strong with sulphur, I lived on it for several days. Wetting my piece of shirt again, and this time tying it around my face, I started searching in the near vicinity for something suitable to build a barrier with.

Luck was with me. Some pumper had made a bed near by, sometime before, out of canvas and boards. There was nearly a half roll of canvas and three twelve-inch boards about twelve feet long. The boards had been nailed together with a cleat near each end. Finding an old pipe-wrench near the pump, I used the handle to pry off the cleats, and by breaking these up, I recovered the nails. One post was standing near the rib on one side, and several posts were lying around close by. I kicked out a hole in the loose coal directly opposite the stand-

(Continued on next page)

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State of New York, } ss.
County of New York }

Before me, a Notary in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared John D. Hartman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Assistant Treasurer of The McCall Company, publisher of The Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

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Publisher, The McCall Company, 230 Park Avenue, New York City.
Editor, Donald Kennicott, 230 Park Avenue, New York City.
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Business Managers, None.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) The New Publishing Company, Wilmington, Delaware. McCall Corporation, Wilmington, Delaware (owner of The New Publishing Co. stock). Brown Bros. & Co., 59 Wall St., New York City; Oliver B. Capen, 381 Fourth Ave., New York City; Carreau & Snedecker, 63 Wall St., New York City; Irving M. Day, Care Guaranty Trust Co. of N. Y., 140 Broadway, New York City; Morris E. Dent, Care Guaranty Trust Co. of N. Y., Madison Ave. and 60th St., New York City; Louis Eckstein, 36 So. State St., Chicago, Ill.; Henry J. Fisher, Care United States Trust Co. of N. Y., 45 Wall St., New York City; Hamilton Gibson, 919 No. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.; Blanche S. Giddens and Chicago Title & Trust Co. as Trustees Under Last Will and Test. of Louis M. Stumer, dec'd, 69 West Washington St., Chicago, Ill.; Guaranty Trust Co. of N. Y., James H. Ottley and Henry W. Sackett as Trustees, under subdivision 1 of Article 19 of the Last Will and Testament of James H. Ottley, Lucetta G. Ottley Trust, 140 Broadway, New York City; Stephen Hexter, 202 So. State St., Chicago, Ill.; McCall Corporation, 230 Park Ave., New York City; John P. Munn, 18 West 58th St., New York City; Sanford Robinson, 26 Liberty St., New York City; Benjamin J. Rosenthal, 36 So. State St., Chicago, Ill.; Sifleet & Co., 60 Broadway, New York City; John R. Simpson, 63 Wall St., New York City; Daniel W. Streeter, 514 Marine Trust Bldg., Buffalo, N. Y.; Theodore F. Stuart, 19 Nassau St., New York City; Wm. B. Warner, 230 Park Ave., New York City; Mrs. Ada Bell Wilson, Care Irving Trust Co., 233 Broadway, New York City; Robert Cade Wilson, Care Irving Trust Co., 233 Broadway, New York City.

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(Continued from previous page)

ing post and close to the other rib, selected a post about the right height, and managed to wedge it tightly with small pieces of boards, using the wrench as a hammer. Next I nailed one twelve-foot board to the two posts near the roof, then one near the bottom. One nail in each end of the boards was all I could spare. Next I dragged the canvas to the side, nailing it to the boards top and bottom. The canvas was the right width as it had been ordered for this height of coal. There was enough canvas to make a triple thickness all the way across with a small piece left over, so tearing off this small piece I put it aside, using it later to wrap my almost naked body in.

Building this barrier had taken about an hour, for due to my weakened condition, I could not work very fast. About every five minutes I returned to the hole to fill my lungs with fresh air.

Thinking maybe some one outside might be near the pipe where it reached the surface, I started pounding on it with the wrench, and repeated this every two or three minutes for about half an hour—but receiving no response, I grew tired and quit. While hammering on the pipe I noticed I could not hear the sound I made, and I knew that the concussion had deafened me. I now realized that the cuts and bruises about my body were very painful, though being busy up until this time, I had almost forgotten that I had been injured at all.

I FELT sure that the barrier that I had built would keep out most of the bad air, and that fresh air coming in around the pipe would keep me alive, so I wrapped the small piece of canvas around me and lay down, after unscrewing the bulb in my lamp so as to save the battery. These batteries are supposed to last for eighteen hours.

How long I slept I don't know—my watch had stopped at eight minutes after five, that being about the time the explosion hit my section of the mine. When I awoke and looked out of the hole, daylight could be seen. It had been dark outside when I went to sleep.

I hammered the pipe again for a while, but receiving no response I could hear, I gave up for a time this way of attracting attention to my position. I was now faint with hunger, so I looked into the pail I had found and discovered there four pork-chops, six slices of "Hunkie" bread, some

bologna, a large onion, and two small apples. I surmised this pail had belonged to a "Hunkie" coal-loader. I ate one chop, two slices of bread, and one apple, washing it down with some water out of the pump. Putting the lid on the pail again, I set the rest of the food to one side for future use.

Now I noticed a small amount of smoke had seeped through around the edge of my canvas brattice, and pulling one side of the canvas away, I saw that the room was full of smoke. The odor of burning coal could be smelled plainly, and the air felt very hot. Then I knew the mine was on fire. I found out later that a fire was raging near Eleven Butt at this time; the rescue-men fought it for about fifty hours before getting it under control.

When I knew there was a fire, I began to feel scared, and almost gave up hope of ever getting out alive. I started stopping all the crevices around the canvas with coal slate and boards. After a while the smoke stopped coming through, the air began to get clear, and I felt relieved again.

I pounded the pipe again for a long time, until I grew tired of that; then I started walking around the twelve-by eighteen-foot space of my prison like a caged animal. Soon I had worn a path around the edge and from the pipe to the canvas. Stopping near the barrier now and then, I would listen for sounds of help coming my way, but could hear nothing. The fire was holding everyone back.

My light by this time was getting dim, although I had kept the bulb out as much as possible. Remembering the battery I had picked up on the road, I transferred the cable from one battery to the other. The tops of these batteries are locked on in the lamp-house outside the mine; the men who work in the lamp-house are the only ones who have a key for them. The cable is attached to the top of the battery and comes off with it. Using my jack-knife, I pried open the lock on both batteries, made the transfer, and by using a piece of wire to hold the top on, I found it worked fine. Now I had a bright light once more.

Having no way to tell the passing of time, I don't know how long my grub lasted, but I think I ate the last morsel in about three days. My water-supply was still holding out. If it had not been for this I would have died of thirst. I began to cough a lot by now and had a very bad

(Continued on next page)

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cold brought on by sleeping in a draft. Everything was wet around me, and this made my cold worse.

The mine had blown up on Saturday evening. Wednesday night sometime, the rescue-men had reached Thirteen Butt. They overlooked the place where I was imprisoned. All of the men they found were dead. Feeling sure that the deadly afterdamp and fumes from the fire had killed everyone in this section, they did not search very carefully here, but passed on to the sections that were not hit so hard. I was probably asleep and did not hear them when they were near.

After four days had passed, I began to lose track of what had happened. I was conscious only at intervals. Sometimes I thought I was lying in a snowdrift freezing to death; at other times I was being burned to death slowly in a roaring furnace, and my thirst was intense. Crawling to the pump I drank what seemed to me to be gallons of water. Then dreams would come about big tables full of food just out of reach. At times I think I must have been raving mad. My lamp now gave no light.

It must have been sometime Thursday night when I pulled down the canvas and started wandering around in the darkness. Temporary stoppings had been erected nearly all over the mine by this time. The fan had pulled fresh air through and the bad air had been cleared out. I remember climbing over a couple of slate falls while wandering around. They seemed to be hundreds of feet high and miles long.

ON Friday afternoon Bill Moore, a state mine inspector who with two members of a rescue-team were making a final search of this section for bodies that might have been overlooked, came upon me sitting behind a brattice. I was about a mile from the place where I had stayed for five days. The inspector was surprised to find me alive, for all hope of finding anyone alive in that section had been given up. They had found the place where I built the barrier, but thought I had wandered off and had been overcome. When they came upon me I was sitting, dazed, on a pile of slate.

I remember being lifted on the stretcher, being covered with blankets, and then—darkness. Days afterward I awoke and found myself in a hospital. A bad case of pneumonia had me in its grip and the doctors and nurses put up a hard fight to save my life. Owing to a strong constitution, I pulled through. My face has healed up, but is dotted all over with blue marks. My hands, arms, and portions of my body were also marked.

Mine was an experience that few men have had and managed to live through. My ability to keep my head during the critical time—and having lots of luck—are the reasons for my being alive today.

Two hundred and eleven men were in the mine when the explosion took place. Seven escaped with their lives. The little mining town is now full of widows and orphans.

The mine has been cleaned up by this time, and new men have taken the places of the ones who were killed. The business of removing the "black diamond" from below the surface goes on as usual.

In about a week I will be discharged from this hospital, marked for life. A month from now will find me back at the same old job in the same coal-mine, or some other one, for coal-mining is all I know. "Once a miner always a miner—it gets into the blood, they say."

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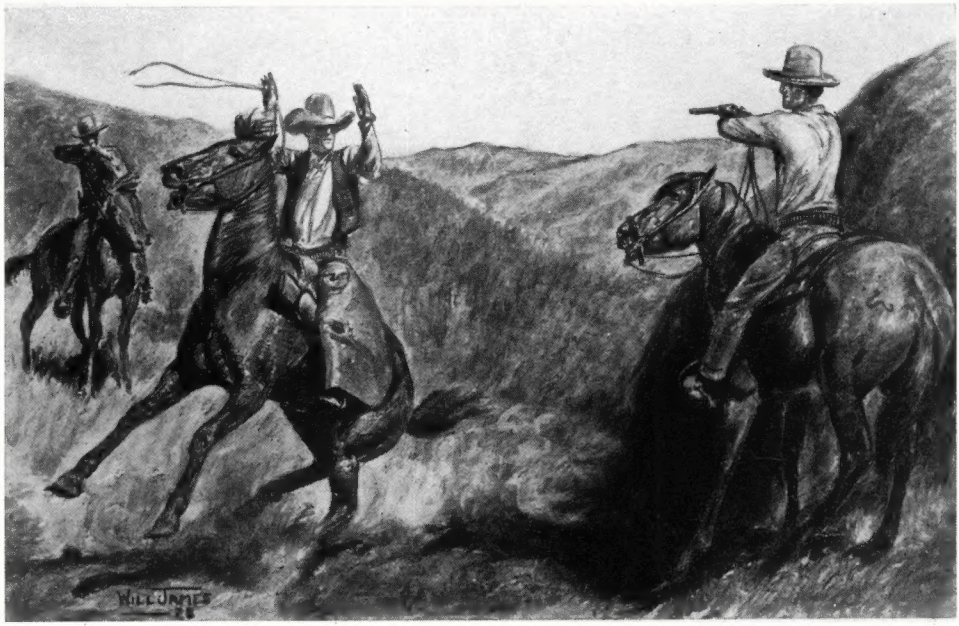

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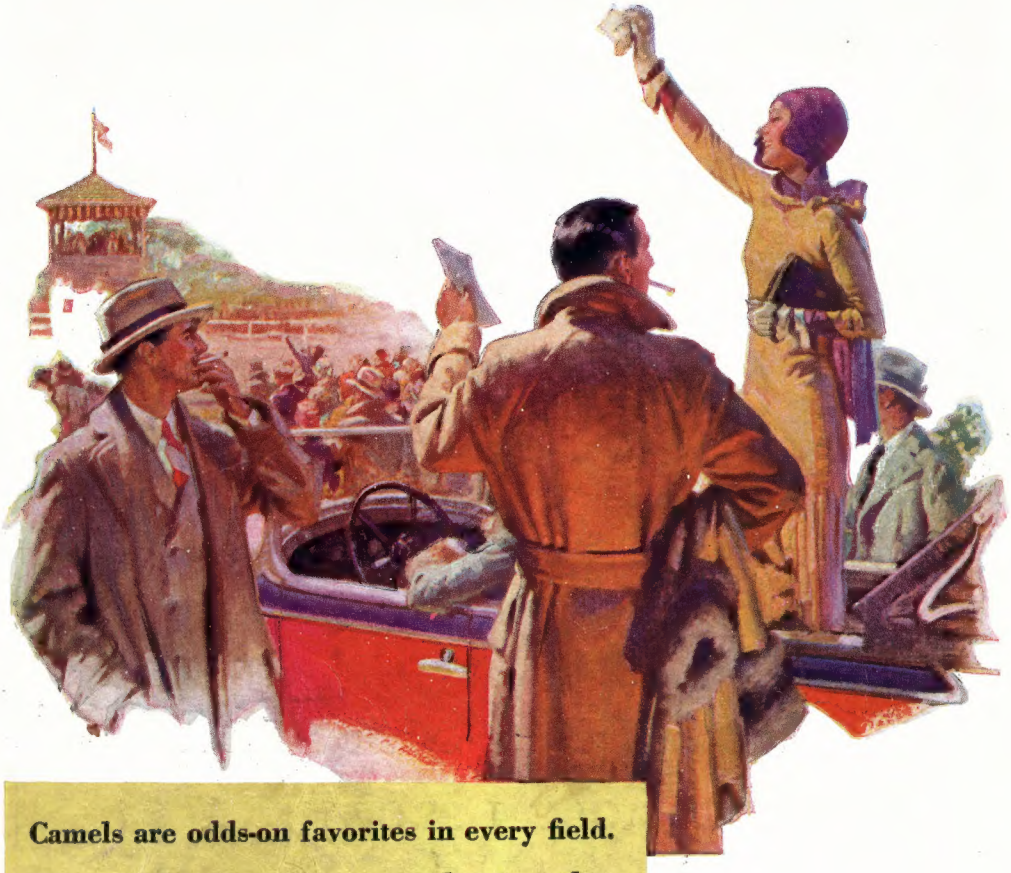

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